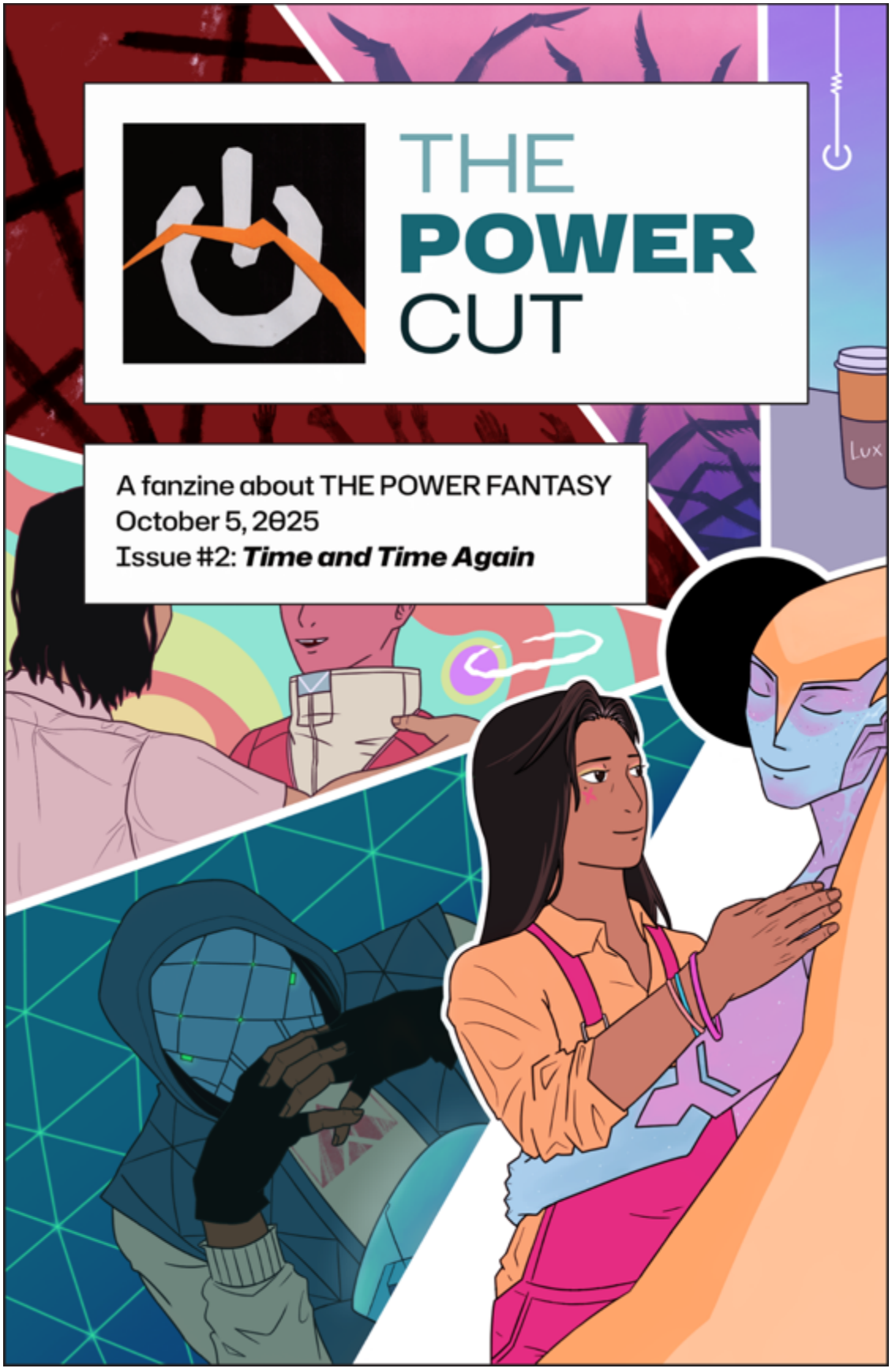
THE
POWER
CUT
A fanzine about THE POWER FANTASY
October 5, 2025
Issue #2: Time and Time Again
Lux

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Introduction: It’s About Time

By Tamsyn Elle

Once again, we return. Wait, wrong comic.

The things we say about time have a paradox to them. On the one hand we stress how irreversible time is. It flies, it waits for no man. This too shall pass. Sic transit gloria mundi, for you cannot step in the same river twice. On the other, we love to tell how history repeats, how things move in cycles; there is no new thing under the sun, time is a flat circle.

Both sets of nostrums bear some truth. Time is not literally cyclical, but all things have their precedents and antecedents. And barring some freaky shit with closed timelike curves and infinitely long cylinders, we probably aren't doing time travel ever, so time is literally irreversible. Yet while we cannot literally change the past, we absolutely can learn from it, and even if we cannot reverse the damage done, we can repair it.

Unless some idiot blows up Europe, or something. Hard to cover up an ouchie that big.

This issue of The Power Cut is packed with art and writing, literally some of which is about time. It's also about a lot of other things, because we pick the themes as an aid to inspiration rather than a constraint.

Why time? Well, The Power Fantasy in its second arc spends a bunch of time in flashback, picking over the intricacies of its alternate history. We've spent the middle portion of *Mutually Reassuring Destruction* taking a close look at the explosive Second Summer of Love (“SSOL”, here and throughout) and ruminating over what happened and why. Eliza in particular was really stuck in it, whence comes our title quotation “Time and Time Again”.

What Eliza's doing when she obsesses and confesses the regrets she possesses, is not merely a religious ritual or a guilt-driven compulsion. She strikes me as sincere when she says she's interested in how her perception of past events and her choices shifts as she looks at them.

As this zine is partially a document of, I'm obsessive when it comes to stories, and I'm a huge re-reader. I frequently return to the same narratives again and again. And when I do I'm struck by how I often get new things out of even well-lived favourites, how a turn of phrase can strike me anew, how the benefit of a few year's new life experience can shift my perception of something I thought I knew well. Rich texts reward this kind of detailed close reading, and TPF is a deeply rich text.

It's also rich art, an aspect of the comic we've tried to focus on more in this issue. Comics are a temporal medium; they're sequential art, where images are placed together such that passing from one to the other in a particular direction conveys information the images alone would not. A string of images arranged into a single timeline, each moment frozen but able to be returned to

and held up in a new light; Eliza's perspective is much like a comic. (We've even got a few of our own nestled inside this issue.)

Let's all be Eliza then, in moderation, and pick over this history. What will we learn this time?

Art by Ferronickel

Once Again, We Return

Cliché versus the Material in *The Power Fantasy* and Beyond

By Jack Xi

> “Yes. It's a good question. Do we ever learn anything?
> I do this time and time again, and I'm still uncertain.”
> — Eliza Hellbound, 1999
>
> “But consider: time and time again, we've studied the nature of God.
> Omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent.
> Remember the middle one.”
> — Eliza, 1976
>
> ““Lying *unnecessarily*.”
> There you go again.”
> — Tonya to Etienne Lux, 1999

The 1999 magitek assassination attempt that opens *The Power Fantasy* is “the latest of many attempts” on Heavy's life. Etienne introduces us to Magus as someone who repeatedly pushes blame onto ““Inverted Pyramid” renegades” for his own unsavory actions. “Not again” is the refrain of a Japanese obaachan Isabella runs past during 1989's Second Summer of Love. In ‘78, the echoic double-bodied Signal attempts murder upon a billion minds. “You can't hurt me,” an irradiated Valentina says in the Oval Office, after the festival bombing of ‘69, “but this can't happen again.”

It's almost trite to observe that, in *The Power Fantasy*, time and time again, catastrophe repeats – human or superhuman, government-sanctioned or otherwise. With frequent flashbacks and the dispassionate Issue #3 closing timeline, the series is a morbid unveiling of the near-clockwork decadal tragedies marring its alternate history. Much like Eliza confronting her inability to find meaning in her own damnation and the Queen's nuclear meltdown, I as a reader become uncertain that I'm gleaning anything new during rereads. Gillen and Wjingaard have delivered on their promise of a sublime and “dreadful” tension through sly plotting and dynamic visuals, but like Eliza I ask: “Do we ever learn anything”? Like Eliza's call to remember the Catholic God's “omnibenevolence”, what quality should we remember?

The “standardization of catastrophe” is a concept first put forth by journalist Norman Cousins in 1946, referring to public outcry toward the Bikini Atoll tests shrinking as the bombings repeated – “the mystery dissolves into a pattern”. Nuclear studies scholar Dr. Laura Considine links the standardization of catastrophe to what she calls “nuclear cliché”. Considine asserts that international discourse calling nuclear weapons and their effects “unthinkable” obscure the

material realities of *which* communities and geographies are affected by the environmental and political costs of nuclear proliferation. She thus suggests that the collective must “confront” and “disrupt” the “limits of international politics”, whose activities are enabled by the cliché of inconceivability and a fuzzy, generalized “humanity” they repeatedly claim to care for.

The cliché of *The Power Fantasy's* U.S. government's disastrous strong-arming is clear in what plagued Heavy and Valentina, and in the implied “neocolonial” actions of the Major. Power uses cliché to obscure how it gambles public safety. While glimpsed at Heavy's 70s protests, we barely see any on-the-ground response led by civilians against their government's actions – the masses of *TPF*'s 90s silently watch commentators on TV, or wordlessly move through airports and life-as-usual. The manufacturing of consent via repetition is clear; one atomic bomb blast at a festival is but an echo of other bomb blasts. A murder attempt on Heavy is but one beat in an inevitable pattern. Suicidal magic use, the Minister of Magic might say, is technological teleology – damn the human or environmental cost.

My thoughts are with everyone who loved the dead. My action prevented Haven's own reprisal, which would have been far bloodier.
Still: all violence is a failure...and I know violent thoughts are now rampant among you.
Some are considering turning thought into action.
We must resist.
A stone thrown at a strange-eyed Atomic comes from the same place which drove this fine country's leaders to attack.
As in, Fear.

To speak up against power is reserved for the powerful, like the grandstanding Heavy and the ominous Etienne… or the brave few like Isabella and Tonya whose role is to undermine cliché. Isabella disrupts the Lux-abetted cliché of her endless, perfect love for Masumi in Issue #9 when Isabella declares: “Sometimes, yes. [I hate you]. I love you, Mia Bella. But sometimes…” In Issue #1, Tonya interjects whenever Lux speaks to his benevolence, undermining the reasonable and down-to-earth image he repeatedly attempts to construct during her interview with him. “There I go again,” he is forced to admit.

Attending to Lux and Tonya's discussion raises the question: what clichés do the Superpowers, including now-dead ones like the Queen, invoke from issue to issue to obscure the true toll of their power? What do they use to pull the wool over others' eyes, and what covers their own?

The most prominent cliché is Godly benevolence. The Queen invokes “heaven on Earth” to win Valentina over with a promise of “utopia”. Long before we read Eliza's theological musings in Issues #7 and #8, Lux pitches Valentina as a “beloved god-queen” whose “benevolent” totalitarian rule alongside him would bring about world peace. Eliza's faith in her God's omnibenevolence is what leads her to her tragic fate within a system we're repeatedly reminded is “unlike” the Christian imaginary. Promises of heavenly salvation are shown (or in Lux's case for dictatorship, implied) to result in the opposite. Most tellingly, art surrounding the Queen's call for “heaven on Earth” implicitly positions her as a haloed deity – a halo whose color inverts into a reality-destroying black hole to hell.

"I don't remember what heaven was like, but this was... everything.
"Manchester was a city transformed. Its population tripled in two months as people rushed towards the party...
"The drugs that summoned ghosts of the future to your lips.
"Music seemed to merge our souls.
"Butterflies of pleasure rising up out of our skin.
"Ecstasy.
"One night, it reached a peak that I'd never imagined. I was so high.
"And then, she turned to me and..."
This is as good as it gets.
We did it.

Gillen and Wjingaard's juxtaposition of the wicked and the divine suggests that seeking transcendence – from the Queen ignoring the material, “cancer”-causing limits of her energy emissions, or Eliza ignoring the metaphysics of her sold soul infinitely echoing through Hell – is a doomed project. Valentina's Issue #7 flashback, gorgeously illustrated in psychedelic rainbows, may be what opens our view onto the Second Summer of Love, but it's Issue #9's plain reality of a suburban rooftop in Tokyo that sees Isabella ending it. A lethal rainbow gives way to the muted colors of the real.

Isabella's retelling of the Second Summer of Love, besides ending on her accusation that no Superpower should exist if civilians are to remain safe, also outlines “the collapse of the food chains” that the Second Summer of Love caused, alongside the “sunburn”, “frostbite” and “cancer” victims suffered from the Queen's radiation. Material facts of flesh, soil, farming, and food return to the narrative despite their omission during the radiation-immune Valentina's retelling of the Second Summer.

Returning to my question of which adjective – if not “omnibenevolent” – is vital to this text, the true beginning of Isabella's retelling of the Second Summer is important. Masumi starts it by asking Isabella for what happened, saying she needs to make art which “looks up” or “around”.

...But you're right. I've been thinking, after the exhibition. Like, I've only worked looking down at the chaos. I want to do work that...looks up? Looks around?
I need other people for that. I need...
Can we talk about the Second Summer of Love?
...Later.
With drinks...

While Masumi is insensitive in her assumption that work which “looks around” requires mining Isabella's trauma for art, she has a point about acts that don't “look down” but “up” or “around”.

With “narcissism” framed as Masumi's problem by both Etienne and herself, Masumi is paralleled to both the Queen – whose void of ego collapsed around her – and Eliza – whose self-described “pride” led to her downfall. To a lesser extent, Valentina commits the same mistake of self-centeredness in the Second Summer of Love. She forgets that what's true for her isn't true for everyone: she's invulnerable, but Manchester isn’t.

Masumi's arrival at the theme of what is “around” therefore seems hopeful. If we recall Considine's point about nuclear cliché, the way out of clichés like divinity is specificity. Considine's call to specificity finds a friend in environmental thinker Donna Haraway's call to “stay with the trouble” or that of theorist Timothy Morton toward “subscendence” – to turn from thought-terminating cliché, such as capitalist infinite growth that pretends to transcend material limits, and instead remain with the “trouble” faced by nonhuman species and the disempowered, finding ways to flourish together as interconnected beings. In other words, to think and work carefully with what is “up” and “around”.

The Superpowers sometimes work in this subscendent, particular mode, underlining its value. Valentina, by living in space since ‘69, makes good on her promise to “live somewhere” the U.S. government “can't kill people” in explosive attempts to destroy her, attending to the squishiness of humanity. If Valentina hadn't broken from that pattern in ‘89 – reminding herself of the radiation the Queen was emitting, looking around at the squishy cancer-proneness of the humans in Manchester – the Queen's cliché of heaven would not have sucked her in and spat her out.

How might transcendence and subscendence figure in the futures of the series’ most volatile Superpowers, Eliza and Masumi, who are trapped in the comic-book cliché of the unstable superwoman? The infernal Eliza finds relief in the assurance of heaven. A source of tension heading into future issues is how Eliza will react if Lux inadvertently or otherwise reveals that there is no God who speaks to her but him, belying the trap of transcendence. Masumi, too, seeks a way to escape “what [she] costs” via “praise” and “public approval”, aspiring to an artistic greatness that eludes her due to her desire for it. Both, in the end, find themselves dwarfed and kneeling alone beneath their repeated performances of monstrous mythmaking, waiting for true comfort that cannot come.

But for Masumi, who is surrounded by magicked leaves when she first discusses “look[ing] around”, and is earlier framed by Issue #2's establishing cicadas and pylons, the implications are clear. If Masumi is the dissociation kaiju, to be grounded in nature, community, and the real rather than self-sabotaging greatness might just free her of power's curse. Perhaps the same will hold true for Eliza, and both women will turn away from the crushing rhythm of the rituals they bind themselves to.

To answer my question of which quality is vital to this text, then, *presence* is our objective over transcendence. To shatter patterns of catastrophe the Superpowers, and us unpowered everymen, must look up and around, rather than down.

Returning to the explosive start of *The Power Fantasy* and this essay, Etienne underlines the ruinous subtext of Heavy's 1999 New York flyby: “And to tell everyone who *isn't* [an Atomic]: *“We're above you.”*” That positioning holds true until the most powerful of those beneath strike

back with an orbital laser. Even then, those lower in the Pyramid fuel the arcanology operations of Dev's laser – from sci-fi orbital stations to mundane server rooms of “support staff, scientists, and the rest” – thus laying bare the contradiction of power: in our world, power comes from around and beneath. We have a chance to speak and act after watching televised cycles of violence and rereading comics on Google Books. What unthinkable patterns have we abetted, while looking down… and what more can we do, hand in hand, once we return?

Art by Jason K Jones

The Coinflip that [Ends/Saves] the World

By Megafire

Even when he isn't literally playing God, Etienne Lux tends to take a rather patriarchal approach to his interactions with the rest of humanity. Being a parent to the entirety of humanity is tough! You have a bunch of tiny people running around, sticking their fingers, tongues, noses and who *knows* what else into things they don't belong because they don't understand why they shouldn't. It isn't that they are stupid, mind, they just don't have the full picture, the *understanding* of what the consequences of those choices are.

Of course, actually controlling the minds of the entire population would be Unethical (and make Valentina kill him), so clearly he will have to allow most of humanity to make their own choices, allow them to shape their own world as they grow to fit within it. On the other hand, he also has a responsibility to protect them from the horrors of the outside world that humanity simply isn't prepared to face, even if that means keeping them from exercising their full agency. The preservation of humanity is, after all, an Ethical Good (and also he'd die if humanity went extinct).

This is a dilemma many parents will recognise: Do you try to control your children more tightly, or let go and trust that you've prepared them well enough to stand on their own.

It's just that the stakes aren't usually this high.

Tell the Truth and Trust

In many ways, raising a child is about supporting them until they can face the world without you, and then letting go. This is not an on-off switch so much as a gradual progression towards independence. Slowly letting go and stepping back as they learn to walk, to run, to soar, still close enough to catch them if they fall, at first, but slowly but surely trusting they can handle themselves. Until they're ready to pursue their own interests and goals as adults, and you no longer *could* catch them even if you wanted to.

Until they're your fellow Superpowers, as it were. Etienne is, after all, rather limited in how he can approach the others. To some extent, he *has* to trust them to make their own decisions, take care of themselves and *not* wreck the planet in a fit of pique. Hell, he *needs* to trust Valentina, because she's his own fallback plan.

It's on this basis that he negotiates with Heavy and Magus, as well. There is still that echo of paternalism in his interactions with them, in how he presents himself as the one to 'smooth things over', makes himself the vessel through which the others can communicate without causing a disaster, and how he plants a spy in Heavy's inner circle, but in many ways he has no *choice* but to trust them to be sensible.

Because we see what he does when he *does* have that choice.

Truth is a Luxury My Ethics Cannot Afford

Etienne sees Masumi and Eliza as the two most emotionally volatile Superpowers, the two that need ‘managing’, whether that’s overt or clandestine. He cannot allow himself to take that step back and trust them to handle themselves, because if that coinflip ends up tails and he’s *not* there to catch them, the world is *done*. With these stakes, it’s downright *irresponsible* not to keep hovering over their shoulder.

This is the anxiety that lies at the heart of every helicopter parent, the worry that stops them from letting their children stand and fall on their own. ‘What if something happens *and I wasn’t there to help*?’

Etienne’s ability as a Superpower, after all, is *only* useful for this kind of prevention. If things ever get bad, it’s too late for him to do anything, a lesson he learned the hard way during the Second Summer of Love.

So he keeps Masumi in her carefully stage-managed dollhouse, where nothing she experiences is distressing enough to set her off. He keeps Eliza convinced that she’s still standing in God’s light, that she has not completely damned herself to Hell, with all the mental strain that realisation might bring with it.

Is Masumi emotionally strong enough to handle the outside world creeping in? Is Eliza’s faith strong enough to *not* need the explicit confirmation of God?

Best we don’t find out whether or not the answer to either of those questions is ‘no’. The world’s at stake.

But that’s not how you raise a child.

The Cost of Not Flipping the Coin

As any parent knows, if you hold your kids back too much, you will stifle their development and hurt your relationship with them.

Masumi is well aware that she *is* being stage-managed, that much of what she experiences is artificial and she is being shielded from the truth. Like every other child, she isn’t *stupid*. She does very much trust that Etienne has, if not *her* best interests, then at least *humanity’s* in mind, but she very much strains against this imposed arrested development. She still *wants* to grow, she still *wants* to experience reality, no matter how dangerous that might be. The more this reality is denied her, the more reckless she becomes in pursuing it, and the less likely she becomes to heed Etienne’s warnings.

And Masumi still actually *likes* him!

There is *already* no trust between Eliza and Etienne. He has to resort to the most outrageous of lies to get her to listen to him in the first place, and while he says that pushing her too far would be unethical and dangerous, this lie itself is already playing into some of Eliza’s worse qualities. She is aware her big sin is pride, but she can’t help but gloat to Valentina about how *she* gets to talk to God. He seems to be poisoning her faith, as necessary as he says this skullduggery is. The longer he keeps this lie going, the deeper this false faith sinks into her, and the worse she will respond when she does find out.

Every time Etienne refuses to flip the coin, the odds of it coming up bad go up, and he won't be able to stop it being flipped forever (even if *he* will be around forever).

After all, the damage he's done to his relationship with Eliza, the environment of paranoia and mistrust *he* fostered, already saw her try to kill him once, all because she was too scared to tell him the truth about Dev.

Thank You For Being Brave Enough to Share

By contrast, when Isabella *does* show Masumi that bit of truth, that glimpse of the reality she *knows* is out there, and the Superpower proves able to handle it? She becomes *more* resilient, *more* able to roll with the punches.

Every time the coin comes up heads, *it improves the odds for next time*.

The stakes are high, and the Superpowers have to operate on a degree of logic so alien to most of us, but they *are* still people too. Trying to stage-manage Masumi through her entire life, trying to artificially keep Eliza's faith alive, will lead to disaster as surely as leaving them to face the world without support will.

But it's through allowing them to grow that they can become the adult they've been prevented from being, and *that's* the narrow path that will lead to reality's persistence.

Art by Jay E.

Will the Abyss Gaze Back?

By Jason K Jones

"I'd have hated to be facing the wrong way at the end of the world."
-Isabella, *The Power Fantasy #7*

You live with a monster. Once, she lost control and demolished a city. This was years before you met. She regrets it immensely, but she can't dwell on it. Reflection means confrontation, and sadness, and death.

It's not her fault, not really. You know the pressure she's under. You know she can't control it. Well, maybe she could, if she tried, but there are risks. People who say they know better tell you it can't be helped. The world is doomed if she's unbalanced, if she encounters a hard truth. We all have to work together to give her a perfectly easy life. It's for the greater good, you know.

And your monster, despite her flaws, is *yours*. She's sweet, and she smiles every morning when you greet her with real coffee instead of the terrible instant stuff she would make if left to her own devices, and she makes sure you know how important you are to her. She loves you, you think. You love her, you know. You think. It's complicated.

Sometimes you hate her. This is a fact that everyone but she can see. You watch her, sleeping on a makeshift futon in her studio after pulling an all-nighter, and you wonder what would happen if you just walked away. She depends on you for so much, and it would be so satisfying to hear that helpless yelp as she realizes she's lost you. The world could end on your terms, and that might just be worth it.

Except you wouldn't hear anything, would you? Most likely she'd change and you'd be crushed before you knew you had been missed. And you need to know. It's why you stay, really. When you're drawn and tired and none of the good parts of your monster are shining, you can still hang on because you must see the end coming.

You saw it once, a technicolor black hole hanging in the sky right where the sun should have been. Then it was gone, and you were still here, sort of. Your whole life disappeared in an instant, but it left your body behind, forgotten.

You don't dare take the chance that you will be forgotten the next time the end arrives. Surviving once nearly killed you. So you stay with your monster. With sufficient care, maybe you can make sure she loves you enough to remember when she destroys everything.

It would be easy to resent the need you feel for your monster. People watch the two of you in public. They're too frightened to whisper in front of her, but you recognize the looks. They watch you with the same sad intensity that you watch her, wondering what madness let

you get caught in her orbit. They think they have more sense than you by keeping their distance, but distance from disaster is a shared fiction. They can't understand, or won't. Either way, you know they think your need makes you a freak. Yes, you could resent it, but instead you cling to it. Needing something, anything, means you're still alive. How could you not love what makes you feel alive?

And then she wakes, and you see her kind, oblivious eyes, and you smile. She's lovely, and she will probably kill you, but maybe she won't. Either way, you see her, and you hate her, and you love her, and you're long past the point of knowing the difference.

Art by Jason K Jones

At School They Taught Me How To Be

This arc we finally got to meet Eliza Hellbound properly, and she's left a hell of an impression, not least on the Earth itself. So we gathered some people with an interest in and knowledge of Catholicism, theology and goth ladies who can step on you to ask them what they thought. Here's their take on the Catholic schoolgirl so naughty she saved the world.

With contributions from: Ariavar (AR), gib (GB), Jason K Jones (JKJ), Matteo Marcenaro (MM), Megafire (MF), Stephen Adkison (SA), Tamsyn Elle (TE)
Coordinated and edited by Tamsyn Elle, with additional questions by Calliope

TE	**How typical does Eliza's religious perspective as a Catholic feel to you, especially prior to her transformation? Does she seem quite nonstandard, even heretical, from the beginning, or are her opinions and behaviour broadly in line?**
MM	I'll start this by saying that what we get pre-transformation, especially the Catholic school snippet we get in her focus issue, doesn't go as far as to seem heretical, but definitely feels like she was on a trajectory away from the faith -- and that's discounting the downright insulting of a saint, which is, you know, a bit taboo unless you're Italian. The "God is good not just" argument I've actually test-run in a formal debate with some conservative Catholics and no-one bats an eye, so I'd say she's still in the church, but perhaps passing through a more rebellious streak. Which then in a way sets up a fascinating contrast with how zealotrous she seems to become post-transformation.
SA	The answer is "yes". Young Eliza is both bordering on heresy and also broadly behaving in line with standard Catholicism. From my understanding, the belief Eliza endorses that God will save all things, the ten-dollar word being *apokatastasis*, is officially condemned as heretical by the Fifth Ecumenical Council. However, there is nuance here. The heresy is believing, as Eliza does, that God *must* save all things. It is perfectly permissible to *hope* that God will do so, out of God's infinite mercy, while accepting the possibility that God may not do so. Many Catholics skirt this line, especially those who attempt to take their faith seriously on a rigorous intellectual level. You could make a similar argument about engaging in magic. While officially condemned, the medieval European alchemical and necromantic tradition was carried out by practicing Catholics, sometimes even by a priestly underground. Most of the time, they saw themselves as exploring gray areas, and not as breaking with the faith. I agree with Jacky's assessment of Eliza's faith when he tells her, "I'm fine with you being a Christian. Problem is, you actually believe it."

AR	Despite Catholicism's fame as being stricter than other branches of Christianity when it comes to doctrine, I feel there is actually more leeway and freedom of interpretation when it comes to everyday views and individual practices. In that regard, I don't think young Eliza's perspective deviates too much from that of the average Catholic. In my experience, emphasizing God as "All-Loving and All-Forgiving" entity over God as an "All-Just" entity is a pretty popular interpretation, especially when it comes to religious education and catechism classes. Heck, even Pope Francis echoed those feelings years ago, saying he likes to believes and hopes that Hell is empty right now (although note that he says *he hopes*; that's a way to skirt the line without falling into heresy). I also agree that cussing out a saint would garner a much more negative reaction from the average Catholic than saying something like, "I think we are all going to be forgiven by God because he loves us all." That being said, where I come from there is more tolerance for "heretical" beliefs, considering that the Caribbean and Latinoamerica have a rich history of syncretism and adapted customs owed to our history with colonialism. So, yeah, it is a bit heretical, but who is not a bit heretical from time to time?
GB	Eliza's view regarding salvation is a Universalist view. Universalism has a lot of variation and depending on the form the view can be considered heretical or merely heterodox. As the other commenters mentioned there are a lot of traces of universalist ideas within Catholicism. Historical figures who are still upheld by the Church such as Saint Gregory of Nyssa expressed universalist ideas. Pope Francis expressed universalist ideas with his hope that "Hell was empty" but he did catch a lot of flak for that. Based on the little we see of the college scene and the other things that Eliza says I'd say that pre-transformation she was a rather liberal Catholic who was perhaps in the church but whose views verged on heresy (albeit a relatively popular heresy), which tracks for someone who would hang out with Magus's counter-cultural crowd.
TE	**Eliza then joins a secret society that practices magic. How remarkable is it for a practicing Catholic to become involved in something occult? Are there occult organisations that profess to be within Catholicism? How does the Pyramid compare?**
SA	This is definitely stranger behavior than her universalism. Anecdotally, Catholic universalists are much more tolerated and welcome within mainstream Catholicism than esoteric or occult Catholics. This is not to say that such people don't exist. They do, especially in contexts where the syncretism of Catholicism and folk/indigenous traditions is more recent. That isn't true of Eliza's native USA. She also isn't a medieval magician, where Catholicism was the norm binding of almost all Europeans. Usually, someone who went to Catholic school and then gets into magic leaves Catholicism. As far as secret societies go, I'm not aware of any magical organizations within Catholicism. Many of the secret societies with conspiracies around them, like the Illuminati or Freemasons, were historically anti-Catholic and the Church forbade membership. The closest example within Catholicism might be Opus Dei, an institution in theory for lay people to dedicate their lives to prayers but in practice allegedly a cult-like right-wing recruiting ground that practices the mortification of flesh.

MM	I can pretty authoritatively speak against those rumors on Opus Dei, but I would like to point at the Italian folk magic veneration of saints, to the Italian Catholicization of Jewish mysticism and occultism during the Renaissance, and to the satanic masses performed by Versailles priests as examples of Catholic esoterica. I'd also like to add from what "Jacky" says in the later issues to the US military, The Pyramid works with Heaven. Which makes me wonder about how the Church deals with the fact there *is* a Heaven.
AR	Yeah, Eliza joining the Pyramid is where things shift from “beliefs that aren’t technically aligned with official doctrine but are fairly common and unremarkable” to “Girl, what the hell are you doing?” A Catholic girl joining an anti-war counterculture organization isn’t totally out of the question. There’s a certain pipeline from Catholic youth involved in charity and community organizing to joining political and activist movements (“if you want peace, support justice in the world”). The problem is that this is a *magical* organization, and magic is an absolute no-no. According to the Catholic Church, magic doesn’t exist, those who practice it are seen as victims of deception and illusion; only God can provide miracles. But in this world, magic is real. More than that, it’s said to be of heavenly origin. That really throws a wrench in the Church’s official position on magic. What’s the difference between science and this kind of magic? Between a scientist developing a vaccine and a wizard curing someone with Pyramid technology? Are its origins malignant, or did Valentina, our angelic herald, bring another divine gift for humanity with her arrival? Isn’t this just another tool God has handed us for the betterment of the world? I bet that caused a number of arguments in every Christian religion around the world. I think Eliza probably leaned toward that latter interpretation: If the spells and seals of the Pyramid work, then they’re God’s provision, meant to help humanity and prevent atomic war. And of course, Eliza, our self-appointed instrument of God, felt compelled to join the Pyramid. Someone has to save the world. Now, how common is it for Catholics to dabble in occult practices? In my experience, it's more common than people think. From tarot and astrology to Wiccan or even folk magic rituals, plenty of practices fall outside Catholic doctrine. Polytheism and divinizing anything other than God are explicitly forbidden. But rules rarely survive contact with reality. Syncretism is especially present in the Caribbean. Santeros, Paleros, and similar religions borrow heavily from Catholic practices. A notable number of Santeros self-identify as both Santeros and Catholics, and there are Catholics who practice folk magic. Even among people who don’t identify with Santería, there’s cultural osmosis; most of my family is proudly Catholic and looks down on witchcraft, but more than once they’ve paid for trabajos or performed spells themselves. These aren’t secret societies, but they are closed practices. There are a lot of secrets and private stuff unless you’ve gone through initiation. That reason for it is rooted in survival; enslaved Africans and Indigenous people did their best to preserve their

	religions and customs while the Spanish tried to erase them and replace them with Catholic beliefs.
MF	The reason anything at all can be said about the occult from way back when is because the people who were engaging with it were literate, which is to say, Catholic monks. The Catholic Church, throughout its history, told its people that practicing magic was forbidden quite a *bunch* of the time, which tells us that those orders weren't exactly followed. In that sense, Eliza could well be following the hallowed tradition of pretending you didn't hear the Holy See and doing that thing you're curious about anyway.
TE	**Eliza has grown up in a world where there's a known, self-styled angel flying around capable of miracles. How might the apparent existence of an angel have affected Catholicism in general and Eliza's faith in specific? How compatible is Valentina's angel-nature with Catholic angelology anyway?**
AR	The angels are supposed to be immaterial and invisible, so I think some people would be put-off and not believe it because of the relatively human attitude and corporeal nature of Valentina. But, to be fair? A lot of Catholics would love her, especially with her role of messenger and guide of humanity that opposes our extinction and nuclear weapons. I will bet my shoes that scapulars and medals of Santa Valentina sell like hotcakes, and some Churches surely commissioned statues and imagery of her. About the Church official position and angeology… I will ask someone more knowledgeable about it to intervene, but Pope Pius XII (the Pope in office during WWII) highlighted in his Humani Generis that angels were personal beings with will and intelligence, not just vaguely spiritual forces, so I guess they would recognize Valentina as the real deal? There would be a lot of debate about her true nature.

SA	The word angel etymologically means "sent one" or "messenger," and this is also true for the Hebrew word translated as angel. In the oldest texts, they seem to be mere emissaries and don't have any identifying characteristics. One might bring prophecies from God to prophets, enact God's will in the world via divine intervention like the plagues in Exodus, or participate in divine liturgy like Ezekiel and Isaiah's famous visions. After more monotheizing reforms, the gods of various polities were recast as guardian angels for their assigned country. In the centuries immediately before and after the turning of the calendar, these angels started gaining personality. Texts will record their names, like Gabriel and Michael, and give them more specific roles like leader of the divine army. All of these traditions were synthesized into the modern Catholic doctrine by the Scholastics, infamously so. That's the origin of the "how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" dig against the Scholastics. Now, as to how Catholics would interpret Valentina, things get more speculative. There would definitely be a vocal contingent that believes Valentina is not an angel. They might see her as an alien or other kind of being more advanced than humanity. Some might think of her as good, but I suspect a number would believe Valentina is actually nefarious. Here's why: the closest thing in Biblical literature we have to an angelic or divine being that was born from a human woman, aside from Jesus, would be the Nephilim. There is tantalizingly little about the Nephilim in the Bible proper, but what we have is a reference to the "sons of God" having sex with the "daughters of man" and fathering superpowered offspring. These are "the heroes of old" and were often thought of as giants. Deuterocanonical (at best) texts like the Book of Enoch describe these Nephilim as abominations to God, and their destruction was one of the intended goals of the flood that Noah survived. There is an active, fringe conspiratorial movement among conservative Christians, including Catholics, that believes that alien abduction stories are actually demons doing the same thing, creating modern day hybrids like the Nephilim of old. I could very much see this being more prominent in a world with someone claiming to be an angel but also born from a human mother. You probably would also have a number of Catholics that venerate her. They might see her as a type of Marian apparition, like Our Lady of Fatimah. They might simply believe her story, that she is an angel. The one thing I could say for sure is that there would be disagreement among Catholics as to Valentina's true nature.
MM	This is really a worldbuilding stickler we can only speculate upon. While I can see the aforementioned Nephilim comparison happening, especially as Valentina seems to be kinda "fallen" (as in, no clear relation with Divine Intent, a lot of questionable actions from a traditional Catholic perspective, and her own admission of descending from Heaven). However, she is kind of all a lot of people would hope for an angel to be, and her presence could definitely be used as proof of faith. I think what matters here is how Valentina presented herself-- which we have surprisingly little information on. An interesting point is her nickname of "saint". We can imagine it was kickstarted by fans, but did she ever acknowledge it? Saints as an idea tend to be Catholic-adjacent, and if she's presenting herself or even just acknowledging that title I think that creates a superficial at least bond with the church.

TE	**Eliza believes she has a personal and direct relationship with God thanks to Etienne's deception. How does such a relationship fit with Catholicism? What has hearing from what she believes to be 'God' done to Eliza's perspective on her religion?**
MM	From my experience, such a relation is comparable to what priests and nuns are supposed to experience: a deep and personal calling from the Lord to take vows. I've heard many people claim a similar conversation with the divine. It is interesting that, unlike one may have speculated up to issue 9, Eliza clearly does not hold herself to the typical abnegations of ordained ones, as issue 10 clearly features her engaging in intercourse. Could this be because "God" has never asked her to become a nun? Likely. It does also remind me of the very famous passage about God carrying the faithful over his shoulders in the hardest parts of life-- perhaps Eliza rationalizes it as reassurance of her future hopes.
SA	There is a vast tradition of Catholic mysticism that Eliza could compare her experience with. Though sometimes controversial with various historic theological conservatives, divine unions achieved through prayer, piety, and fasting have been a part of Catholicism since nearly the very beginning. If anything, Eliza's direct hearing of God is tame compared to the fits of ecstasy reported by figures like Hildegard of Bingen.
AR	Talking to God and taking prayer time as a space to speak your doubts and receive answers is pretty common. When you are young and learning religion, there is a big emphasis on how God is your best friend, he will always listen to you, will comfort you and will guide you. That being said, I also feel Eliza's attitude towards Etienne's deception might be a hint towards her prideful nature, because a big thing in the Catholic faith is how you don't need signals to believe, your faith should be strong enough to stand on its own. "*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (John 20:29). This is no God nudging you towards the correct answer, this is a literal voice speaking in your head… in a world where an extremely powerful telepath is scheming 24/7, the messenger angel told you she has never heard God's voice, you didn't heard God's voice until you became a superpower. Shouldn't you be treating it with more suspicion? Your faith is strong enough to withstand a possible future in Hell, so why would God start sending you voice notes to prove his existence? But Eliza believes herself exceptional, and a part of her is scared enough that she grasps at any hope.
TE	**Let's talk about the nature of Hell! We haven't really seen it depicted directly yet, but it's definitely not the fire and pitchfork type of imagery. What does Catholic doctrine have to tell us about the nature of Hell, and how does TPF's vision thus far compare?**
JKJ	I am not Catholic, so I'm not claiming specific expertise on that branch of Christianity's considerations around Hell, but speaking broadly about the modern Protestant imagination, Hell is fundamentally a permanent separation from God. There are differing opinions on whether this separation involves eternal conscious torment or annihilation of the soul (how can a creature of God meaningfully exist separate from them?), and from there you get into questions about what the torment looks like.

	In the Bible there are a couple passages in the New Testament that refer to damnation as akin to being cast into flames, but beyond that Hell isn't really a focal point of Scripture. I believe most of the popular conception of Hell derives from Milton's epic poem, Paradise Lost, which is an absolute banger if you are into stories about Lucifer being defiant and doomed at the same time. Jacky's description of Hell as churning chaos below ordered time feels rooted more in elements of various creation myths that describe the place outside of space. Milton makes use of this cosmology in his poem, but chaos is a place between Hell and the Garden of Eden, something that's hostile to everyone. What I find fascinating about the chaos Hell of TPF is that Etienne's question about whether you even can experience torment without a temporal component to existence leaves open the possibility that this Hell is closer to annihilation than ECT. Eliza's obsession with whether she can be saved may be the extent of her conscious suffering, which, *phew* we probably don't need to get into Calvinism as that's a pretty thoroughly Protestant concept.
SA	Hell is surprisingly not a very explored concept in the Bible. You get Hebrew Scripture references to Sheol, a kind of neutral holding place for the spirits of the dead, and in the New Testament some scattered references to a burning place like Revelation's Lake of Fire. As a result, there is some pretty big variation on the exact nature. Catholic dogma specifically emphasizes Hell as separation from God, specifically one that is chosen. You see this clearly in another source for the popular conception of Hell, Dante's Inferno (not the video game). There, the damned, seeing clearly God's perfect goodness, are so ashamed of their sin that they willfully choose the punishments of Hell. By contrast, the Hell of The Power Fantasy doesn't seem like a populated realm. We don't see any of the damned, or any spiritual beings like demons. We don't even know if Eliza "made a deal with the devil" in a literal sense or if she is just tapping into the power source they have labeled Hell. To me, it seems much more like a kind of chaos realm to contrast Heaven's order than the abode of the damned.
MM	Hell here seems very interesting, if but because our understanding of it is much less related to God. As has been said, Catholic Hell is the absence of God, but in TPF we cannot even define Heaven in such a way. What it seems to be is Law vs Chaos as two primal forces on the opposite sides of creation. Eliza having sold her soul to Hell is also fascinating, as we finally get an idea of what such a "place" might want a soul for: to gain a perspective in time and space. This reminds me somewhat of Da-sein in Heidegger, human nature being defined not just by a thinking principle but by a spatial and temporal limitation.
AR	So, I agree Hell's fundamental characteristic is that it is separation from God, but we don’t have much depiction in the Bible itself. The Power Fantasy depiction stands separate from those lines and leans closer to more sci-fi concepts, a dimension of fundamental primordial chaos that stands in opposition to Heaven’s total order. I’m also curious how it seems like Hell has its own will and feels almost alive (“*it craves the novelty of a subjective experience of linearity, it is a simple exchange*”), there is

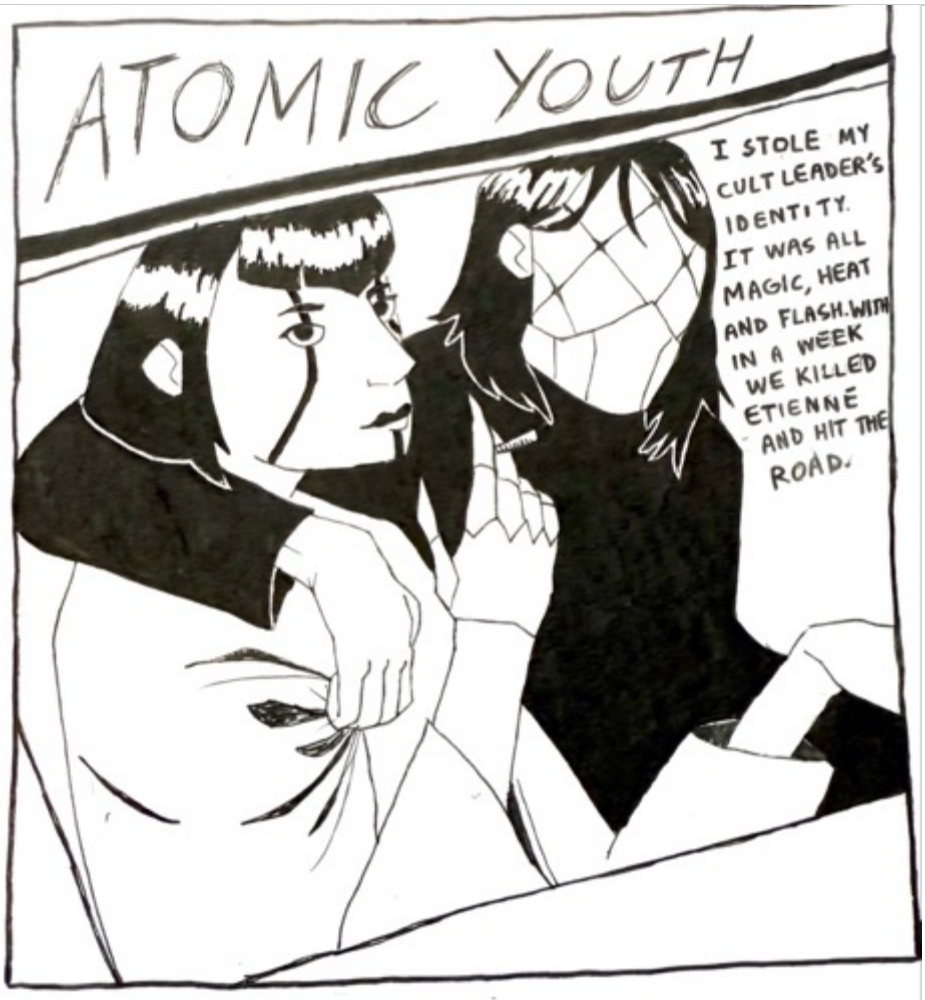
	something really eldritch about it. If Heaven can have their own machinations, why not Hell?
TE	**As Magus said, it's time to deal with metaphysics and the concept of infinite, fucknuts. Is infinite punishment for necessarily finite sin really how Catholicism views how God's justice works? In short, should Aquinas really go fuck himself?**
MF	Infinite punishment for finite sin, as any sin is a crime against the infinite, was also why many of those medieval tortures were so... inventive. Crime at that time was often conceived of as an offence against the King and, as they were the divinely appointed mortal ruler, God Himself. Committing such an offence should be unthinkable, and so the punishment was often as extreme as possible. The divine itself disapproving of your actions. Nowadays the Catholic Church, as an institution, has mellowed out some, but opinions within it still vary. (Of course, Aquinas should go fuck himself because the very concept of something finite being able to meaningfully damage something infinite is ridiculous, so infinite punishment for finite crimes is infinitely unjust, but this is very much an outside-Catholicism critique of that perspective, rather than an inside one.)
MM	This is where my own Catholic upbringing differs from Eliza's. Though yes as a child it's presented as punishment, as soon as you hit the rebellious yet bookwormy teen phase, it immediately is explained to you as the inevitable consequence of not choosing God--and of free will truly only mattering on earth (which while usually very contestable imo -- see: The Good Place -- is not textually supported by TPF, wherein Hell and Heaven have no meaningful expression of time and thus choice and thus redemption). You play the game, you take your outcome and then if you didn't choose God, you don't get God. On the topic of Aquinas, I can only say he's the reason behind one of the only two times I have said swear words on God/saints.
SA	There are several potential resolutions one can find to Eliza's argument, and your mileage may vary on how convincing you find them. One argument is that the problem isn't finite sin, but sinning against an infinite being. Thus, the merited punishment must also be infinite. Another argument would be one of free will. God isn't punishing the sinners, but rather that Hell is the natural consequence of sin that the damned freely choose. Under this view, it would be unjust of God to deny people their free choice. Finally, there has long been a belief, not officially endorsed but very much allowed, called annihilationism. This is the belief that souls simply cease to exist if they are not brought into Heaven. I should also add that Catholicism teaches of Purgatory, a "working off" of sins for those destined for Heaven but not yet purified. There is an increasingly popular belief that Hell is more of a purgatorial situation, a finite punishment that will reform the damned. This is sometimes combined with an annihilationism for the worst unrepentant sinners. God's justice and mercy, though universally accepted within Catholicism, still contain much debate and disagreement.

AR	I think this goes back to the first question, that people don't really want to think what infinity really means, and if you were to press Catholic people about it, you will get a lot of them dodging, more on the defensive, and supporting more universalist ideas. You can also go with the logic that people who end up in Hell are those who had refused God's mercy and love, made themselves unworthy of it, and if you refuse infinite love, you *choose* to condemn yourself to infinite misery. God respects your free will after all. Here is also how some Catholics bring the concept of purgatory, if you regret your sins, you will receive the punishment of separating from God, but eventually you will enter his Kingdom, finite punishment for finite sin! Solved! (Note the fact that if you die in mortal sin without perfect contrition, you won't get forgiven. Pass purgatory, don't collect, and go straight to Hell.)
TE	**Finally, let's talk about pride. Eliza feels she sinned by deciding to intervene in the Second Summer of Love rather than having faith it would work out. Leaving aside that a Catholic God presumably wouldn't approve of the means she used to intervene, is she right on the general point? Is it prideful to decide you are the person who needs to act in a crisis?**
MF	There is that classic anecdote about a priest during a flooding, waving away rescue workers several times, saying that they shouldn't bother because God will save him. When he dies, he asks God what the fuck, and God says 'what do you think I sent those rescue workers for?' God helps those who help themselves, and whatnot. This *probably* doesn't include 'sell your soul to Hell', but when the literal Angel fails to stop the threat, you can either conclude that God's attempt has failed, which I don't see any Catholic doing, or accept that you might just be the tool God has chosen to use. Is that pride, is that arrogance? Maybe, but I think the priest in the anecdote has something of a point, still. With God's omnipotence, why would He *need* to work through mortal intermediaries? Even if he only saved the pious and devoted, that would still leave room in the rescue boat for others. Now, that's questioning God's interventions and His wider plan, something Catholics won't do (which is why I'm not a Catholic), but I think asking 'okay, what if I *hadn't* stepped in, what *would* have happened?' is reasonable. What *was* God's plan, if not *this*? Etienne's utilitarianism gets called out by Dev as being materialist in a world that hasn't been in a while, but there is still only the one timeline between Heaven and Hell, and Valentina was clearly sent to keep it going, so acting with that in mind seems like it's the whole *point*. When we see someone tied to the tracks, the train's coming, and we're in a position to get that person out of the way, are we not morally obligated to do so? Can we condone *not* doing it? How just can someone really be called if they push you to desperation and then judge you for acting as a result of it? But when you're down *that* road, how much room left is

	there for faith?
MM	On this, I think Eliza's solution is *deeply* tied into why she considers it the sin of Pride. Stepping in in a crisis is *not* pride. It's the good Christian thing to do. However, seeing a crisis that a literal angel is failing to handle, having powers that are still somewhat tied to Heaven in your hands through which you could help partially, and then going "you know what though, someone needs to do the Big Part and I'm gonna do it because I'm clearly the only one who will, and to do it... I'll defy God and sell my soul to literal Hell..." yeah that's several steps out of line. I think part of why it's pride is also just... The Queen. Bear with me. The Queen is an extranormal being, descended upon earth, who claims to want to save the world and make everyone happy, but is apparently destroying it. And as far as Eliza knows, she has a literal angel on her side claiming that's gonna be Heaven. and Eliza, seeing this, which many would reluctantly interpret as God's plan, goes... ok no, someone has to save the world. Which also feels like rebellion against God. It reminds me of how you can't write a good novel about priests stopping the biblical apocalypse... *because they shouldn't stop it*. To try and save the world, which is ultimately predestined for destruction, is absolutely a sin. Now, personally I'd argue its sin falls somewhere between greed, gluttony and lust... But if you read it in the sense of "this is probably God's mandate, but I can meaningfully stand in the way of it, as long as I get Hell's powers", then fuck yeah that's Pride, of the highest order.
MF	Would that hold even if you understand God's mandate to be the continuation of that timeline?
MM	Do we have any proof that she had any basis to believe that? And even if she did, relying on definitely ungodly powers to do so seems like a big lack of faith in God on paper.
MF	People generally accept that Valentina is an angel, and she seems to have been pretty open about that being her mission, no? That said, yeah, jumping into Hell is... a pretty big leap.
MM	On the one hand yes; on the other I always read the way she talked about it as a pretty openly non-Heaven-sponsored mission.
SA	This may be a point of disagreement, but I interpreted Eliza's pride not in her intervention, but in her confidence that her actions were correct. She's verging on the historically condemned belief of antinomianism, which argues that because God's forgiveness is infinite for those who accept it, there are no longer any moral laws binding the faithful. Eliza thinks she can do something ultimately "evil", like make a deal with the devil, because God will forgive her no matter what. I think that is the source of the pride, not in the intervention itself.

JKJ	I find that it's kind of a mixed bag. Again, I don't have a background in Catholicism, but one thing that was hammered into me repeatedly in my evangelical days was that Catholics feel strongly that you justify yourself as a Christian through both faith and actions. This is in contrast to Protestant evangelicals who love to cite Ephesians 2:8-9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast," which they typically interpret as meaning that it's a mistake to believe you can work your way to salvation. An evangelical Protestant would say Eliza's decision to directly intervene is an exceptional act of pride. I tend to think that her intervention itself isn't sinful inside a Catholic framework of helping others at cost to yourself as an expression of your faith. The more complex question may be whether Eliza's decision to act instead represents a moment of profound despair, which is the mortal sin behind the Catholic taboo on suicide. It's at this point that I start to get wrapped up in questions of the nature of Eliza's suffering, because I genuinely wonder if Eliza's damnation is more in the extreme paralysis as an independent actor that she experiences once she descends. Despite her vocal skepticism of Jacky, it's clear she believes in the Pyramid's mission, and selling her soul robs her of the will to do anything but cloister herself away and become a near omnipotent ascetic.
AR	Eliza’s perspective about SSoL is peculiar because I felt it reveals more about her self-perception than about Catholic doctrine. Catholic teaching tells us that faith is not enough to save us, we need to put our money where our mouth is, our actions should reflect our religion… and inactions play on it too. There is the concept of sin of omission and the deadly sin of sloth, if you know you need to do something and you don’t do it, that’s a sin (ie: you heard a wounded person calling for help and you fail to help them or call an ambulance). If she knew or sensed there was a way to save millions of people and didn’t move a finger, because God surely had other plans… then that could perfectly count as a sin of omission. What I think her statements betray, and where I think you can argue she was sinning of pride, is that she sees herself as the “Chosen One,” so to speak; she is arrogant and, voluntarily or not, sees herself above other people. She is the picture in that Onion article “*Somebody's Got to Save This Country From Certain Doom, And Let's Face It, That Person Is Me!*”. She was the golden girl at the top of her class who picked inconsistencies in her religion classes before all other kids and decided to pick a fight with one of the most prominent theologians of the Middle Ages, she joined this shady cult looking for answers to the secret of the universe and the power to change the world, she resented the fact she couldn’t access the highest rank of the Pyramid when her husband could, with her lashing out against him and cutting him off, guilting him in revealing secrets. Her actions during SSOL weren’t entirely selfless; she wanted to fall, *she wanted to be proven right*. And that’s where Eliza’s shame and guilt stem from. As an addendum, I find it interesting how one can argue Eliza seems to be the Saint to end all Saints, the Martyr to end all Martyrs. Martyrs are the ultimate witnesses; they put

	their whole faith in God and go through the most terrible tortures, death, and sacrifices to prove their steadfast belief in God's grace… and what sacrifice is bigger than willingly condemning your soul to Hell? Flaying? Stoning? Being boiled alive? Nah, we are going to combine all of those by going straight into the dimension of eternal pain and suffering. Eat your heart out St. Bartholomew!


ATOMIC YOUTH
I STOLE MY CULT LEADER'S IDENTITY. IT WAS ALL MAGIC, HEAT AND FLASH. WITH IN A WEEK WE KILLED ETIENNE AND HIT THE ROAD.

Art by Walter

Dare We Hope That Eliza Be Saved?

By Rose Crown

"*Sin is behovable but all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well."* - Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love

"If I were wholly inflamed with the fire of Divine Love, would I not then, with a burning heart, beseech my Creator, the truly merciful One, to show mercy to all my brethren?" - Catherine of Siena

"*Then faith in the unboundedness of divine love and grace also justifies hope for the universality of redemption.*" Edith Stein, Welt und Person

"*A true pentinent soul will not burn. God will save us all. So in conclusion… Thomas Aquinas can go fuck himself.*" - Eliza Hellbound

In one of the most bitingly ironic moments in *The Power Fantasy* Issue 8 opens with a flashback to the past of the woman who sold her soul to Hell as a schoolgirl arguing for her belief in universal salvation. Eliza, in her teenage rebellion, frames her views as an attack on established authority but situating her views in the history of Catholic theological debates on Hell can help us better contextualise them.

Eliza positions herself in opposition to Aquinas. While her assertion that "God will save us all" is certainly contrary to his views, her insistence that all who display true penitence will not burn is a sentiment he would share. In *Summa Theologica* Aquinas argues it is "erroneous to say that any sin cannot be pardoned though true Penance... this is contrary to Divine mercy... Therefore we must say simply that, in this life, every sin can be blotted out by true Penance".

Hope for salvation was long considered a virtue by Christian theologians but prior to Aquinas this was largely considered to be hope for one's own salvation. Joseph Trabbic argues that this stemmed from Augustine claiming the object of hope was "only what affects the one who entertains the hope". Aquinas while agreeing that hope is about what affects oneself argued that as we are bound to others one is affected by what happens to them and can therefore hope for their salvation. There is disagreement about how widely Aquinas intended this to extend. Some claim that it only extended to hoping for those you are personally close to while others claimed it applied more widely.

After his death Aquinas was recognised as a saint. While there is a lot of mysticism associated with saints at its core a saint is simply a person the Church recognises as being in Heaven. As we are discussing Eliza Hellbound you might wonder whether the Catholic Church teaches the converse - that certain individuals are known to be in Hell.

The short answer is no. The longer answer is that in 1460 Pope Pius II held a trial in absentia for an opponent of his Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta. Malatesta was accused and convicted of various crimes including incest, murder and rape (though the veracity of these claims is doubtful). Effigies were burned and Pius publicly declared that Malatesta was consigned to hell even though he still lived. Even Pius himself doubted the validity of this declaration and few since would assert that Pius's theatrics mean that we know Malatesta is damned.

It is easy to imagine that Eliza might find Malatesta being damned by Pius reminiscent of her own experience.

The episode is of historical interest only. Despite Malatesta's unique case, it remains true that few Catholics would assert that they know any specific individual is damned. Since Catholics don't claim knowledge that any particular person is damned a further question arises. Is possible that nobody is in Hell?

The work of the 20th century Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar is relevant to this question. Balthasar would go further than Acquinas and in his controversial book *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?* would argue that hoping for the salvation of others should extend to hoping that everyone will be saved. Balthasar marshals theological arguments bolstered by support from scripture to argue that there is hope for universal salvation.

Balthasar's views while controversial are firmly within the Catholic mainstream. John Paul II announced plans to elevate him as a cardinal though Balthasar died prior to his consistory, the then Cardinal Ratzinger (later Benedict XVI) presided over his funeral and stated that the church "tells us that he is right in what he teaches of the faith" and though not referencing him directly Pope Francis expressed similar views when publicly stating that "I like to think hell is empty; I hope it is."

Crucially, Balthasar does not argue that he *knows* everyone shall be saved. He draws an analogy to having a sick friend that he hopes will recover without knowing that they will. In Balthasar's view there are passages from scripture and revelations from saints that imply many are suffering in Hell while other passages and revelations imply the opposite. Faced with this contradictory evidence he believes that the correct position to take is to hope that all will be saved without asserting that you know this is the case. In this way his book is significantly more timid than Eliza's confident speech.

Balthasar is reluctant to quantify how likely it is that his hope will be realised. Even this however was enough to earn him opprobrium from those who believed that his teachings were likely to lead many to Hell by lessening their fear of it. On the other hand other Catholics have gone further than Balthasar and while rarely asserting certainty appear to argue that it is likely or even probable that all will be saved.

None perhaps has gone as far as Edith Stein who predated and inspired Balthasar. Stein believed that "the descent of the grace to the human soul is a free act of divine love. And there are *no limits* to how far it may extend". She argued that though the possibility of damnation remained in principle, "in reality, it can become infinitely improbable".

Unlike Etienne Lux, Catholic theologians have long had to deal with the concept of infinite. Something being infinitely improbable implies the probability that it does not happen is 99.999...%. It is simple mathematics that 0.999... repeating is equal to one. It follows that a probability of 99.999...% is equal to 100% and it is at minimum possible to read into Stein an argument that the possibility of damnation rather than merely being small is non-existent.

Eliza's views while not elucidated in depth assert that everyone will be saved. Different interpretations of what she means by this are possible - perhaps that Hell is a temporary state or that rather than being existent and empty Hell does not exist at all - but given the emphasis placed on how seriously Eliza takes her faith it is reasonable to assume that while radical she still wishes to fall in line with Catholic teaching as far as possible which those interpretations would not. This would imply she holds views similar to those outlined above but in her pride takes them further than is typical and claims not just hope but certainty that all will be saved.

When Eliza learned what the Pyramid knew about Hell it would have both reinforced and tested her faith. Despite Magus (both Jacky and Dev editions) claiming that this hell is not the Christian conception of Hell what Eliza learned of through them is that Hell exists and is empty which aligns with her long existing religious beliefs. Under Eliza's theology however it should not be possible to damn yourself with a ritual so the claim that one can give oneself over irrecoverably to Hell provides a challenge to her.

Jacky considered Eliza unsuitable to be a Fucking Arsehole not because she was a Christian but because she "actually believe[s] it". Later when he learns that someone has sold their soul he immediately infers that it must be Eliza. Jacky's reluctance to raise Eliza to the rank of Fucking Arsehole was likely in part fear that she would sell her soul. Catholics have an unhealthy fixation on venerating martyrs and many saints have both wished and vowed to sacrifice their own salvation for the salvation of others. When Jacky tells Eliza there is information he doesn't trust the Arseholes and "especially you" with he looks down at her crucifix necklace, a symbol not just of Christianity but specifically of self-sacrifice.

Jacky's fear was justified. Eliza damns herself to save the world. In damning herself to save others she acts saintlike in the very moment she becomes the opposite of a saint.

However, unlike the saints discussed here it isn't the salvation of souls that she does this for but the mere protection of mortal lives. It is hard to imagine how this would add up for someone like Eliza who takes her faith so seriously until you consider the specifics of her theological beliefs. She is certain that God will save everyone. Even as she damns herself she is certain that "God will never turn his back on" her. After the destruction of Europe she still clings to the belief that "no one's doomed" and it is only later as she grapples with what she has done and the destruction she has wrought that her certainty shatters.

We know less of Eliza's theological beliefs after the Second Summer of Love. While she fears for her own soul it is unclear whether she now considers others at risk of damnation. Given her inward focus in relation to questions of salvation it is not an unreasonable assumption that her faith that others are saved remains intact even as she now fears for her own soul. Returning to Balthasar this interestingly aligns with what he considered the ideal view a Catholic should take towards the possibility of damnation; he approvingly quotes Kierkegaard "as far as I am concerned the situation is that all the others will, of course, go to heaven; the only doubt is whether I shall get there."

We can now consider the question posed by the title of this piece. Dare we hope that Eliza be saved? If we view it through a Catholic lens the answer is clearly yes and not just for those who like Eliza, Stein and Balthasar hope that all will be saved. While selling your soul to Hell in exchange for power isn't something the Catholic Church would recommend, to put it mildly, neither is it an act that irrecoverably damns her. If Eliza is pentinent she can be saved.

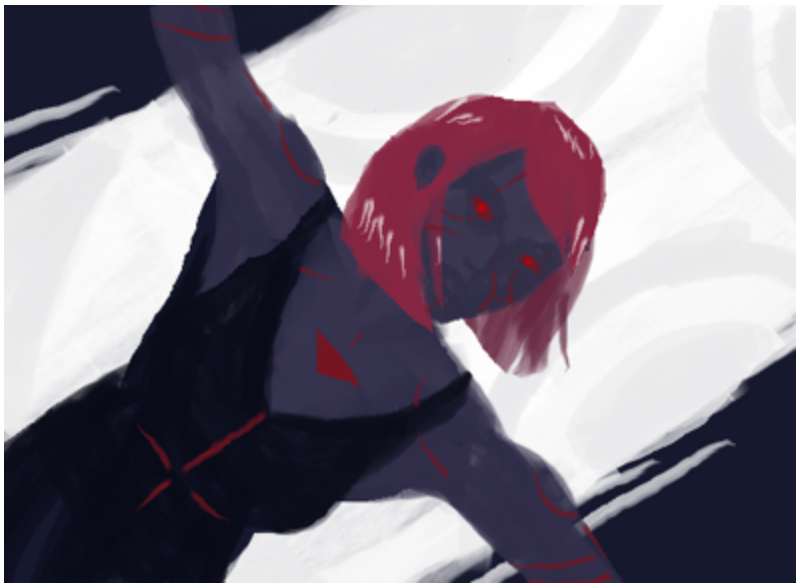
For those of us who are not Catholic and look at the Hell depicted in The Power Fantasy from a non-religious point of view there is also reason to hope. Rather than by the love of God, Eliza may be saved by the love of Jacky Magus.

Jacky seemingly "died and descended into hell", though admittedly not in that order. Even considering it from a non-religious point of view, potential literary parallels to the Harrowing of Hell (Christ's descent into Hell following his death to release souls who died before he came) are obvious. Jacky sends Dev back to Earth and remains in Hell. Jacky may have been planning to hitch a ride on the Signal 2.0 or may have needed to remain to close the hole to Hell but it is only after he learns that Eliza damned herself that

he proposes the plan with Dev taking his place which suggests a third possibility that he decided to stay in Hell as part of a not yet revealed plan to save Eliza.

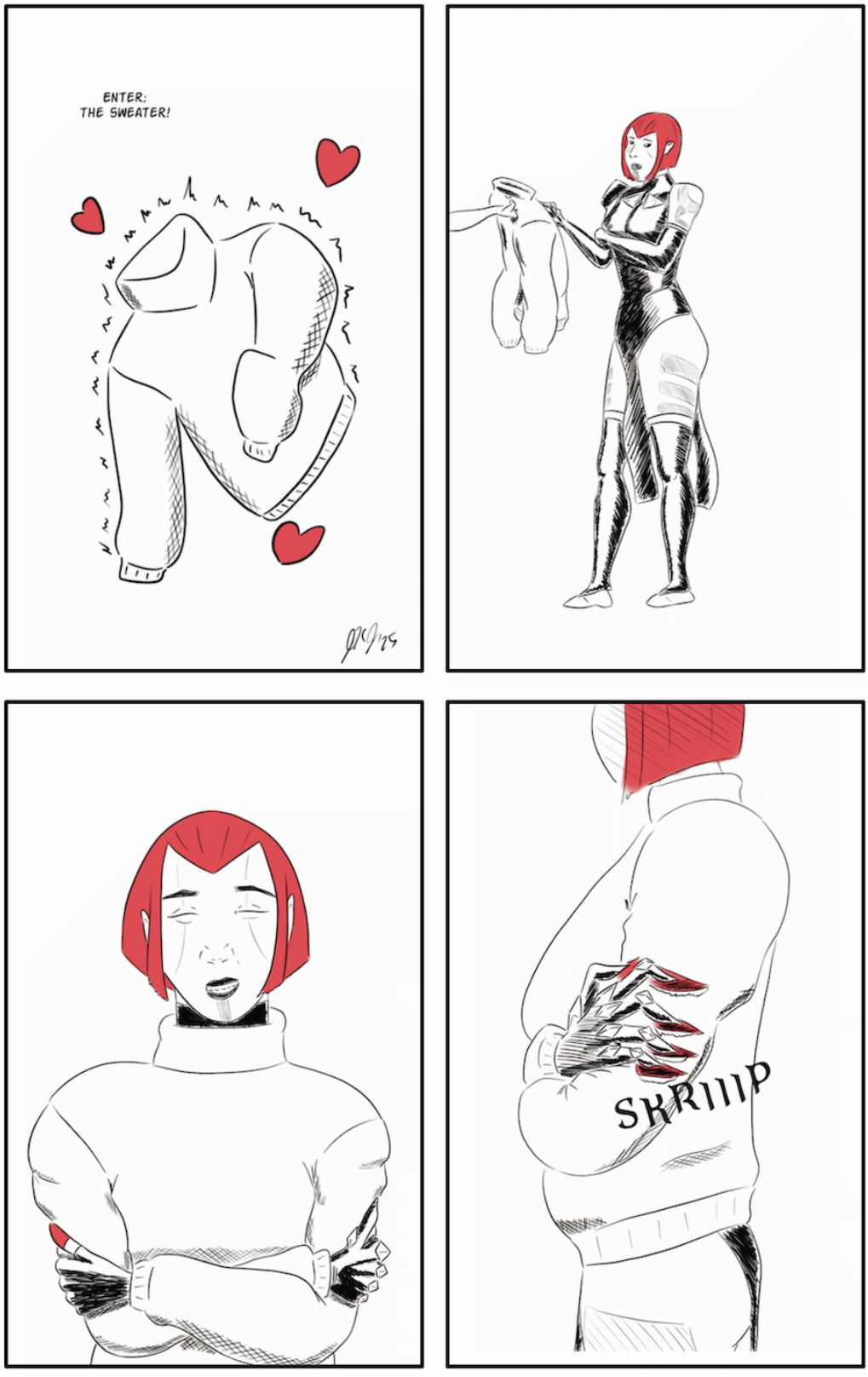
If Eliza was freed from damnation it would seem to reaffirm her youthful theological views but if this happens her reaction might be more complex. The mark of selling her soul, destroying Europe and later actions particularly the mortal sin of murder will stay with her.

Even if Eliza is saved, she can't turn back time and return to being the prideful rebellious girl she once was.



Art by Jack Xi

GIVE
ELIZA
HELLBOUND
A SWEATER!
THIS IS ELIZA HELLBOUND.
SHE SOLD HER SOUL TO SAVE THE WORLD.
IT'S PRETTY SAD.
THIS IS ELIZA BEFORE ALL THE HELL NONSENSE STARTED.
YOU CAN SEE THAT HER WHOLE VIBE WAS A BIT DIFFERENT IN THE '80S.
NO ONE KNOWS THE REASON FOR THE GOTH MAKEOVER.
IS IT A CHOICE SHE MAKES?
IS IT INFERNAL INTERVENTION?
THE WORLD WANTS TO KNOW!


ENTER:
THE SWEATER!
SKRIIIP

DAMN.
DISCARDED SHREDDED SWEATER
NO CLAWS!

SMOLDERING PILE OF DISCARDED SWEATERS
FLAME RETARDANT MATERIALS

FUCK!
GROWING DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE SWEATER DREAM
GROWING PILE OF DISCARDED SWEATERS
EVIL SWEATER: GUARANTEED HELLPROOF!
SERIOUSLY? THIS?

THIS SWEATER MADE WITH THE SOULS OF A MILLION KITTENS
MEW
THIS SWEATER MADE WITH THE SOULS OF A MILLION KITTENS
MEW
MAYBE WE CAN PUT SOME DUCT TAPE OVER IT.
SHUSH. LET ME ENJOY THIS.
THIS SWEATER MADE WITH THE SOULS OF A MILLION KITTENS
ART AND STORY BY
JASON K JONES

The Music of the Future

By Roscoe G.

“If it’s not love then it’s the bomb that will bring us together”

Every Kieron Gillen comic is about music. That’s maybe not strictly true, but it’s difficult to think of anyone in mainstream American comics whose work is as richly coloured by music fandom and history as his. There’s a moment in Grant Morrison’s *Animal Man* where the eponymous hero listens to R.E.M. 's “Superman” on his headphones after a brief encounter with the Man of Steel.

It’s a cute beat. It tells you Buddy’s a hip young guy with good taste. A more cynical writer might say it mainly tells you *Morrison* is a hip young “guy” with good taste. In a Gillen comic, music has more weight than that. When Lloyd from Phonogram listens to a Los Campesinos! track it articulates something intensely specific about what he cares about, what moves him, what that song means right now. If you know the band it’s ecstatic and if you don’t you’ll look

2. The International Tweexc...
3. It Started With A Mixx
4. Sweet Dreams Sweet Cheeks
5. We Throw Parties You Thr...
Kasbah (14+)(w/Copy Haho

them up.

Caspar Wijngaard is no stranger to comics about music either. The opening pages of *Home Sick Pilots* could only be drawn by someone who knows exactly what it feels like at a shitty punk show, with a Hernandez-esque reverence for sticky floors, bored crowds and electric guitars. I’ll spare you another hundred words about the fascinating alchemy between a purely visual and purely auditory medium (it’s all been said by smarter people than I) and leave it at this: *The Power Fantasy* has music in its blood stream, and the veins show.

The very second spoken line of the book is about the Lovin' Spoonful. It's an incredibly powerful scene. We're introduced to the Superpowers twofold. These are people who could, as Etienne proposes, take over the world, and these are also people who go to gigs and eat pizza. It's humanising, and in its humanity, petrifying – the ethos of the book. The mid '60s setting feels essential too: It's the decade of pop music and the cold war, the Beatles and the Bomb. This is the central dichotomy with Valentina, whose birth in the opening sequence of the third issue puts it into very literal terms. Doris Day's "Sentimental Journey", an angelic little pop song, serenades the Brazilian hospital room at the very moment of detonation in Los Alamos. It reads as a mission statement for Val, but also the book as a whole. *The Power Fantasy* exists at the critical intersection of the monstrous and the beautiful - every character is as much defined by their favourite songs as their powers of mass destruction.

This issue is more overtly infused with music than any other in the series, and its standout sequence is no exception: during the apex of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Valetina sits wide-eyed, gleeful as she tears open a parcel - Telstar by The Tornados, "Number 1 in the UK." as the note from Etienne reads. It's an image that could be almost ripped from a period piece Phonogram story, as she shuts her eyes and enters a hippy-phantasia before disarming the major US and Soviet nuclear bases seemingly instantaneously. "I heard the music of the future. The music of the future needs a future to exist in." It's not subtle but Wijngaard works wonders here, between the pastel drenched serenity of one panel to the greyscale void of the other.

It's the ecstasy of falling in love with a song, and the comedown. In the prior page the symmetrical layout of the spread literally transforms the Earth into the centre of the record. As Valentina orbits it like the satellite of the song's namesake, the visual metaphor is clear: it is her whole world right now.

When Superman saves the world it's out of a fundamental goodness, his undying love for humanity. Valentina does it for a pop song. It's no less altruistic, but it grounds it into something utterly human and *specific*. Telstar is an incredible track, and "the music of the future" is apt, both in its revolutionary production techniques and in the electronic, whining, utopian, sci-fi soundscape it conjures. And it makes sense that Etienne appreciates its technicality at the least. The fact he is the one to send her the record speaks volumes. In *TPF*, even the most chillingly didactic character - a man who literally controls his own mind on a chemical level - keeps up with the charts.

I think another interesting differentiating factor with other musically-aware comics is how inextricable music and characterisation are in TPF. So many of the cast are grounded in scenes. Valentina seems like something of a musical omnivore, but she is constantly linked to the first and second Summers of Love - a hippy at heart. Heavy is a Detroit radical who Gillen talks about in the same breath as the MC5, with Haven as his Ann Arbor commune. Jacky is a Brixton punk and Dev and Eliza are at least connected to the scene. In all three cases music is intrinsically tied to their radicalism. Magus at first glance is the classic image of the sellout punk, the Johnny Rotten whose ideals were either hollow in the first place or traded in for a suit, tie and conservative politics. He's a character as informed by archetypes of musicians as music itself - even if in his case the sellout really *is* a different person to the idealistic younger man. Ever aware of her ex-friends' music tastes, in #3 Valentina gifts him a vinyl copy of the Dead Kennedy's *In God We Trust Inc.* as something between a gesture of good will and a condemnation.

Even beyond “Nazi Punks Fuck Off” it doesn’t feel like a coincidence that the increasingly right wing Magus is linked so specifically to a band famous for the song “California Uber Alles*”* in an arc which culminates with his plan to run for US Presidency.

But the interest in scene culture isn’t limited to characterisation. In an EXTREMELY Kieron Gillen move, the world-changing global tragedy, and primary focus of the second arc, is set in amongst the real world second summer of love: a British music and culture phenomenon fuelled on ecstasy and acid house. *The Power Fantasy* dares to ask - what if the world ended to a Stone Roses track? The Queen’s Madchester utopia is filled with bucket hats and drugs but what Val is most enamoured by is, of course, the music. Music, again being emblematic of her divine calling and hippy optimism. As the Superpowers meet to discuss The Queen’s intentions, Heavy and Val’s matching double denim and aligned position on the matter seems particularly of note.

Cool it, Magus. "Second summer of love." She's speaking my language.
She's coming from the utopian side of the movement but...maybe it's time for utopia?
I like her!
Etienne. What do you think?

To return to my ‘scenes’ point, they are both most defined as 60s countercultural figures. Heavy is the White Panther activist and Valentina the idealistic bohemian - from “the utopian side of the movement” as Harris says about the Queen. Their shared values here are in immediate contrast to Jacky, whose 70s punk cynicism and anarchist principles would happily point out that free love led to Manson too.

The 1989 sequences in Issue Seven are gorgeous. Even knowing the party is on a one way road to oblivion, the Queen and her followers make a compelling argument. Apartment buildings are draped in peace flags and connected with makeshift bridges. It’s an ever-expanding, city-wide commune.

*...and it was just wonderful.
*She was turning Manchester into a city of love, house by house, street by street.
*I hadn't been at a festival since New Mexico, and this was like a dream of that, more so...

It’s Val’s heaven on Earth at last. Wijngaard paints the pages in the same blotted pastels as those previous Telstar panels while Gillen echoes Valentina’s previous gig-turned-nuclear-devestation. “I hadn’t been at a festival since New Mexico and this was like a dream of that…” But the Queen’s paradise shatters - our recurring dichotomy: perfect songs at the end of the world. Sentimental Journey and the Trinity Test, Telstar and the Cuban Missile Crisis, The Second Summer of Love and the decimation of Europe. Gabriel’s trumpet in the century of the radio. To self-indulgently quote both Kieron Gillen and my favourite band: “we are beautiful, we are doomed.” The apocalypse imagery is haunting and deliberate, a technicolour explosion from a single, perfect black circle. An eclipse of the Queen’s brilliant light. Or perhaps another kind of black circle at the centre of things – a record.

Essentially, I think in The Power Fantasy music does two key things. On the macro-level it serves as a form of quiet worldbuilding. This is a world populated with our music history, grounded in the specifics of real movements and scenes. There is no equivalent to Watchmen's fictional "Pale Horse", Gillen is a writer interested in precision, and real world media is a more effective tool. But on the micro-level it informs and dictates these characters. *The Power Fantasy* is certainly not *The Boys*, and it is not even *Watchmen*. Doctor Manhattan and Homelander don't have favourite songs. These characters do. The fact is, with the possible exception of Etienne, this is not a comic of Rorschachs or Adrian Veidts. In some ways, it's a comic of Dan Driebergs. It's a book about what real people do with immense power. People shaped by music like we all invariably are. Because in our world the people who press the big red button have a favourite song too. *Is that comforting or terrifying?*

Art by Jay E

Ways to Make It Through The War

By Tamsyn Elle

In a comic written by Kieron Gillen, the unexpected emergence of people with superpowers in 1945 alters the course of history, profoundly altering the terms of all future conflict. I speak, of course, of the Avatar Comics series *Uber*, lamentably as yet incomplete, in which Nazi Germany is delivered just prior to Hitler's suicide by an army of superpowered “Panzermensch”, also known as Ubers.

Uber is a very different comic to *The Power Fantasy*. *Uber’s* temporal focus is tighter, remaining locked on 1945 and 1946 with only very brief excursions in flashback to earlier points; unspooling the chain of consequences stemming from the emergence of the Ubers and how they affect the course of the war.

It is a comic of numbers, logistics and mechanics. Even game mechanics: the Ubers exist in classes with a rock-paper-scissors interaction. Events crucially hinge on the logistical details of how long it takes to make an Uber (approximately a month) and the precise numbers of them it was possible for various combatants to field at various times. *Uber*’s narrative voice is objective and uncharacterised, commenting on events from the detached, hindsight perspective of the historian.

It also diverges significantly from established history, such that it would be impossible to imagine that *Uber*’s 1999 would remotely resemble our own. In this respect it is a truly alternate history: moving from a single point of divergence, nothing thereafter can be assumed to occur as it did in our own timeline. History in Uber is fragile, hinging on details and vulnerable to being shifted.

We can contrast another Kieron Gillen comic, in which the manifestation of superpowered individuals affects the course of the centuries, in which the squabbles of a small group of these powerful people could turn out to have massive implications for the globe. I speak here of course of Image Comics’ *The Wicked + The Divine*. Contrasting with the impersonal tone of *Uber,* the comic we'll shorten to *WicDiv* has a deeply personal narrative voice from one of the key participants and characters, Laura Wilson.

In theory the universe presented in *WicDiv* is even more vastly different from our own, with supernaturally empowered demigods striding the planet for six millennia, since the dawn of civilization, and with those gods possessing powers far more diverse in manifestation than the relatively limited and mechanical sets available in Uber. Despite this, the 2010s presented in WicDiv are intensely similar to our own. It is not that the gods of the recurrences have no effect on the timeline: we see analogues of various 1920s Modernists and 1830s Romantics dying ahistorically both in manner and timing. But these changes turn out not to matter, and the actions of the successive Pantheons have largely acted to steer history in exactly the fashion history reports, including having responsibility for phenomena such as the Black Death. This is a

convergent alternate history, where events are different but conspire by the hand of an author to still produce a present much like our own.

These two approaches have different things to stress to us about the nature of history. *Uber* stressed history's contingency; how much things could have been different, how individual moments can have enormous effects downstream. *WicDiv* stresses instead broader historical forces, which may be orchestrated and guided by individuals (one in particular!) but where events largely serve a master narrative.

Where, then, in this implied spectrum, does *The Power Fantasy* sit? At first blush it would seem to sit much closer to WicDiv's side of the aisle. The 1999 it presents has marked differences to be sure, and one enormous one, but is still largely recognisable; up to 1989 things have converged enough that it seems Ronald Reagan was still US president in the 1980s, even though Nixon was killed years before Watergate.

But there's a large Europe-shaped hole in this logic. The catastrophic conclusion of the Second Summer of Love scarring a whole continent from the map tilts the narrative, promising how far events could go by showing how far they've already gone. It's a major stakes-raiser, to be sure, but it's also the biggest single deviation from the historical timeline by far. But it's delayed until 1989, so the full ramifications of that deviation haven't really had time to express themselves. We're left with an alternate world still in a post-traumatic haze, still recognisably ours (right down to *Neon Genesis Evangelion*) but also irreparably shifted.

As for narrative voice, TPF has not yet offered us one. It stresses neither individual, subjective perspectives and narratives nor a quasi-objective "just the facts" recounting of minutiae. This is a story that is neither discovered through the assembly of historical data as Uber is presented, nor one that is being directly told by any of its participants. It is instead a story that's emerging as gestalt of the actions of personalities.

Why do it this way? To answer this we have to ask what alternate history narratives are for. It's tempting to say that an alternate history that hews closer to real history does so in order to better comment on our history, whereas more divergent histories are more intellectual science fiction exercises of exploring a premise to its conclusion. But that feels false; all narrative comments on the real world, however allusively.

It also feels insufficient to appeal to a relatively late diversion from history as pure stakes-raising for the purpose of escalation, a kind of inciting incident. Yes, narratives generally escalate in terms of tension, and having Europe be obliterated is certainly an effective way to do that, but it's insufficient justification for something as structural as this.

I think the answer lies in that earlier dichotomy between the contingency of history and its being shaped by broader forces. Of course the truth of history is a mixture of both things: history emerged both because of small individual events with cascading consequences and larger

trends. But the question of what creates history gains sharpness when we consider one of TPF's key subtexts: how the twentieth century was formed by the prospect of nuclear war.

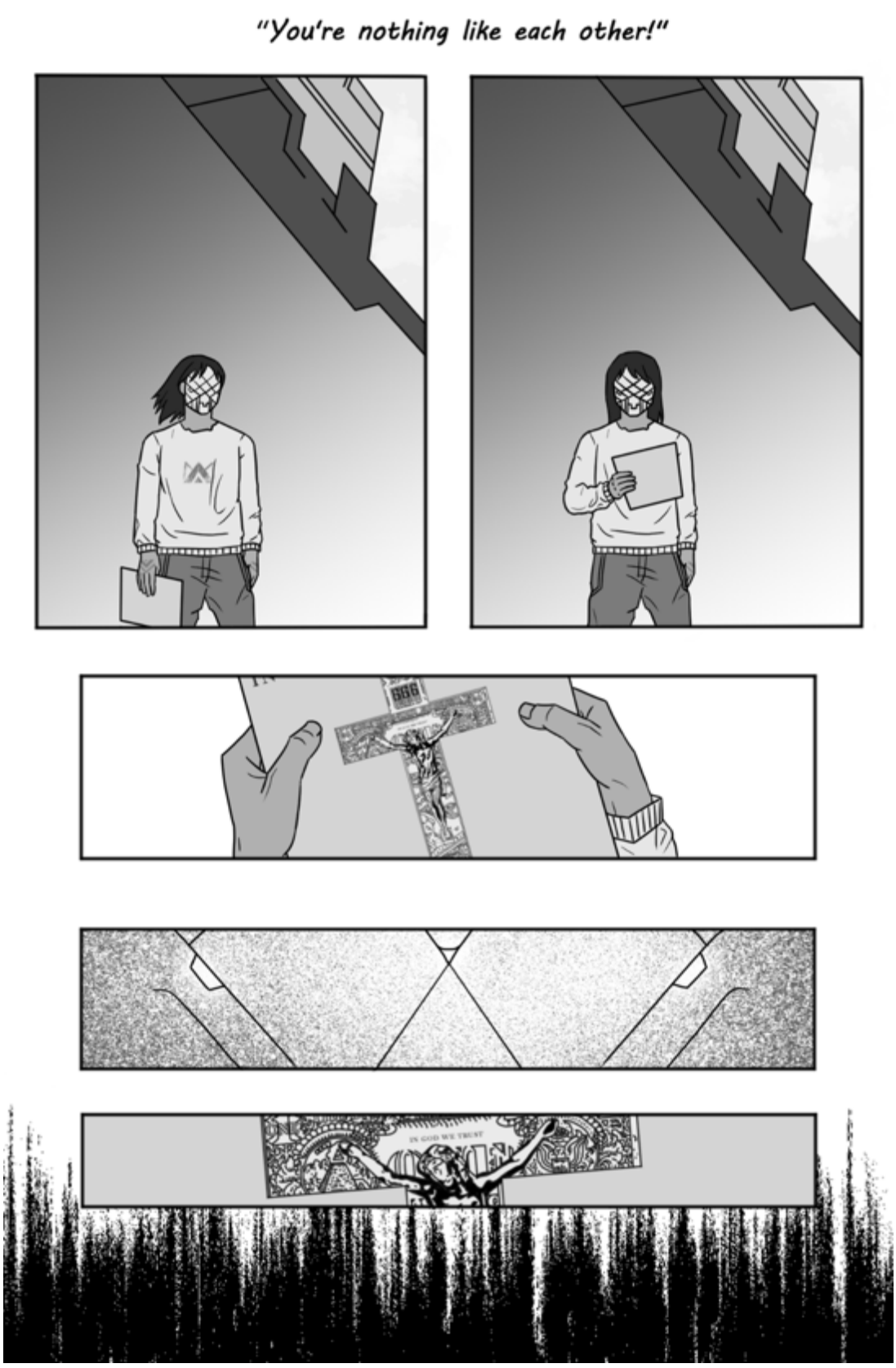
The Cold War period is especially acutely characterised by the intermingling of broad historical forces — such as the grim logic of mutually assured destruction — with moments where individual decision-making was what stood between us all and oblivion (everyone say thank you to Vasily Arkhipov and Stanislav Petrov). It is both explicable and logical that we have not all died in a nuclear war, and tremendously fortunate; simultaneously rational and conditional.

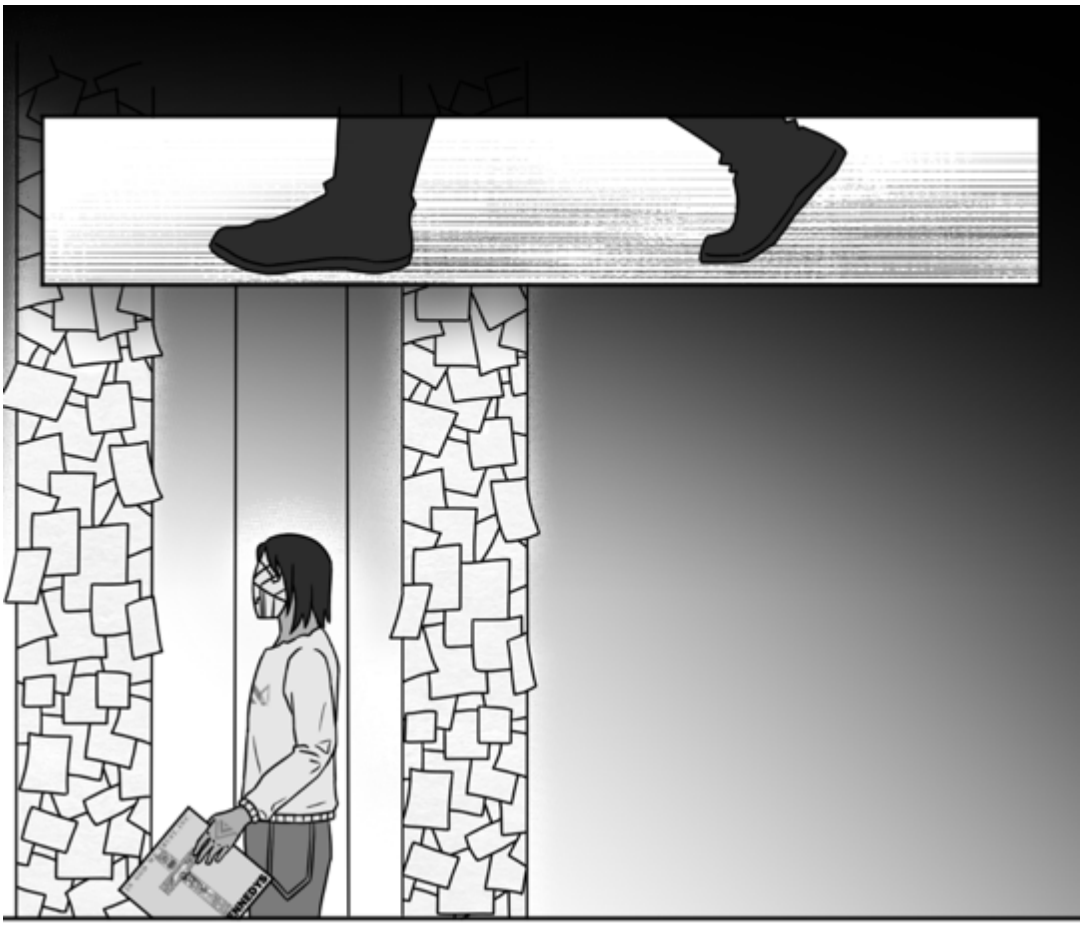
In some ways TPF's alternate history does present relatively direct comparators to Cold War events. The Cuban Missile Crisis unfolds similarly, for example, albeit with an actual angel substituting for the better angels of our nature to trigger the de-escalation. (And what effect did that have on the Cold War political situation, to have de-escalation enforced rather than arrived at by themselves?) Even the big departure of the Second Summer of Love is still timed so as to cause the fall of the Soviet Union roughly in line with established history.

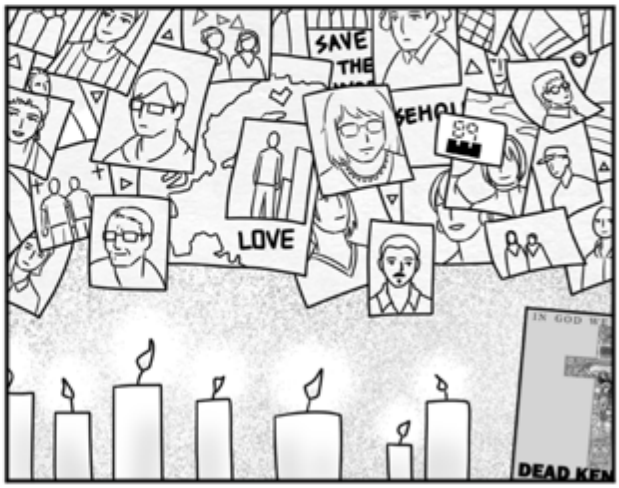
Yet it would be a mistake to view TPF's superpowers as simple analogues for nation states. Instead it is the *decision-making pressures* they operate under that are analogous. Nobody, not even Magus, represents America (well, maybe the Major did) in TPF's universe, but the characters do partly embody *types of thinking* by superpowered actors, from cold utilitarian logic to hotheaded brinkmanship to the yawningly terrible knowledge that it could all come down to the wrong person having a bad day. Even the revelation that Jacky Magus deliberately sought Superpower status to get his viewpoint a seat at the table, or that Eliza did so to counter another Superpower, has a mirror in the nuclear proliferation that characterised our 70s and 80s, with nations recognising that possessing nuclear weapons was the way to be listened to internationally, or to avoid being pressured by a bellicose neighbour.

If nuclear war were more personal, history might well have been more chaotic, but it would also still have been guided by many of these same thought processes. TPF's relatively mild divergence from our history allows it to better depict both sides of that equation. It functions as a dramatisation of the effects of power on ways of thinking, on how the possession of world ending arsenals inevitably distort personalities, replacing trust with paranoia and peace with detente. And then it shows us just how fragile it all is, and just how lucky we were and still are: at least, for now.

Comic by KN






SAVE
LOVE
DEAD

You Are (Not) a Monster

By joju997

The Power Fantasy Issue 11 answers a number of important questions: is Kid Ignition a Superpower? Will Eliza and Dev be able to surprise Etienne? How much does Etienne know? But, crucially, there is one reveal that has been overlooked for far too long: Does Neon Genesis Evangelion exist in The Power Fantasy universe? Thanks to a throwaway line from Isabella, we can finally confirm that it does.

For those unfamiliar with the anime, the basic premise of Evangelion is that on a post-apocalyptic Earth, a group of giant monsters called Angels attack remaining centers of human civilization, mostly Tokyo (now Tokyo-3). Tokyo-3 is defended by a group of children paired spiritually with giant mechs called EVA units, working for a shady organization called NERV. The protagonist, Shinji Ikari, is the young son of NERV's director, estranged from his father and most other people as a result of neglect. During the series, Shinji is drafted into the EVA pilot program, and without spoiling too much, strains and breaks his ties to his friends and family as part of saving the world.

I have long joked that Evangelion has to exist in the universe of The Power Fantasy, because of its emphasis on a destroyed Japan living in fear of the next giant monster that will inevitably crush them all in a casual step again. There is extensive lore around the show's creation and its intersection with real-world events and creator Hideaki Anno's mental health during its development, which would likely be amplified by the more extreme devastation that happens in the comic's alternate history. And that is not even acknowledging the fact that Masumi is functionally an Angel that would be fought in the show.

Comparing Masumi to an Angel is a straightforward analysis that would work well for psychoanalyzing an alternate-universe version of Hideaki Anno, which would be fun. But I am more interested in the effects of watching the show on Masumi for purposes of this fanzine about the comic Masumi exists in.

Imagine you're Masumi Morishita. You are the most unintentionally dangerous person in the world. Every time you get stressed, you run the risk of killing millions of people in a best-case scenario. The five people who can best relate to you all have significantly more control over themselves and see you as a liability. You discover a show about a kid who has world-destroying power handed to him and is pointed at bigger problems and told to solve them. The connections write themselves.

Masumi and Shinji are close parallels in that neither of them asks to be in the center of the main conflict of the world. Both have an authority figure who puts direct pressure on them to play their part and play it perfectly, and the worst part is, they know that the authority figure isn't wrong.

In Evangelion, much of the plot tension comes from the relationship between Shinji and his father. The show establishes that Shinji comes to Tokyo and chooses to stay with NERV out of a desire to have some connection with his father Gendo, who relentlessly exploits the connection to make him pilot the mech. Exact translations of the moment differ, but a key part of the reunion between father and son in the show is Gendo shouting at Shinji to “get in the robot or get out.” Shinji wants love and wants community, but all that awaits him is service.

The equivalent in TPF is the relationship between Etienne and Masumi. Etienne, long positioned as the spokesman or friendly face of the Superpowers, takes it on himself to watch over Masumi, trying to keep her from summoning her kaiju. He gives Masumi a cutesy phrase to get his attention - “Etienne-monster-crayon-kitty-Masumi.” He even micromanages her relationship with her girlfriend to keep it as saccharine as possible. He keeps her satisfied because it is the least bad option he can manage. As he admits to the other superpowers, he tried to kill her when she first appeared, but could not get into her head. So he shepherds her instead.

As of the end of the second arc, it’s unclear how much Masumi knows about what Etienne thinks of her. She seems to express genuine affection and appreciation for him keeping an eye on her, but there isn’t evidence that she knows Etienne would rather have a world without her in it, and Lux certainly has no reason to tell her.

Note: The rest of this essay will proceed with full spoilers for Neon Genesis: Evangelion.

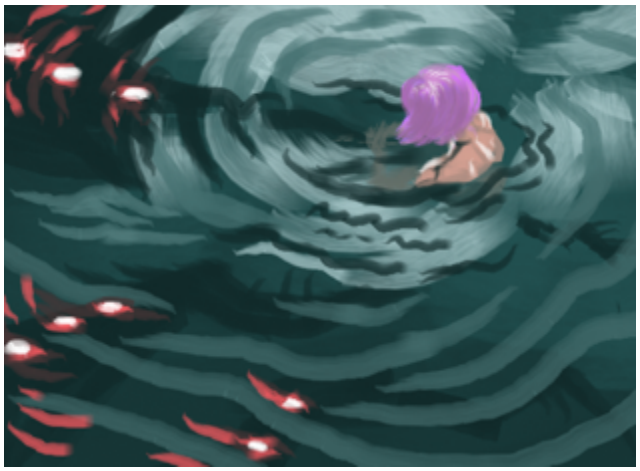
Evangelion’s convoluted endings are a major part of its reputation, but there is something in their symmetry that would especially appeal to Masumi.

For people who are reading this section of the essay without watching Evangelion, there are three “official” and equally valid endings for the show: the televised ending, the movie ending released a year later, and the remake ending released decades after the fact. All three share a similar structure: NERV’s mission fails and the angels are used to end the world. Human consciousness is merged into some kind of collective entity, but Shinji retains enough individuality to make a choice about whether or not that collective consciousness will continue to exist or if the world as he knows it should return. The differences come in how this is visualized and, more relevantly, what Shinji chooses to do.

In the ending of the TV show, Shinji reflects on his own self-worth and decides that he is worth continuing to exist in a world with people, and restores the world by affirming his own value. In the movie ending, Shinji comes to the opposite conclusion: because he is miserable and isolated, he chooses to continue existing as a person and leaves the human collective. Finally, in the remake series, Shinji rejects the binary he is offered and instead chooses to make a new world where the events of the series did not happen, creating a world where people are able to live without the threats that exist in the world he knows.

While the remake complicates the simplicity of the binary choice, there is still a fundamental divergence that holds relevance for Masumi as a person. She seeks artistic fulfillment and

validation. She, like Shinji, wants attention and community, but also has the dark side in her that, by being denied those things, can destroy humanity as a whole. Watching Evangelion for Masumi is watching someone with more agency than she has build up to making a choice once that she has to make every day. For her, every day is the End of Evangelion. And, like Shinji, when all is said and done, she can end up on the edge of a ruined Japan, watching the reddened ocean lap against the shore of what was.



Art by Jack Xi

The Fantasy You're Living Now

By Blastweave

When we're first introduced to Storm in *Giant Sized X-Men #1*, she's using her weather manipulation abilities to resolve droughts in Kenya. She's been at it for a while- long enough for a religion to have developed around her, complete with a temple and ritual by which her followers contact their "Goddess." She's interrupted while wrapping up her work by Charles Xavier, who approaches her with an offer of enlightenment, so to speak; an opportunity to use her powers for the good of the broader world.

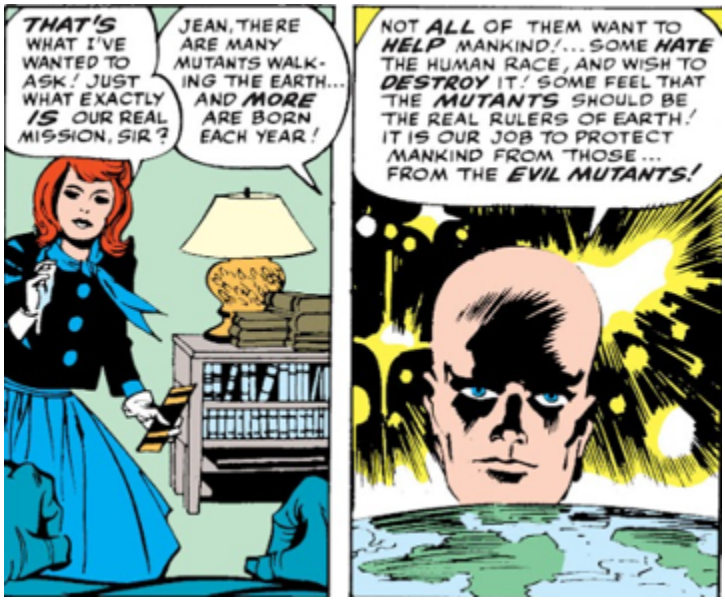
YOU HAVE A LAND, ORORO-- AND PEOPLE WHO ADORE YOU.
I OFFER YOU A WORLD-- AND PEOPLE WHO MAY FEAR YOU, HATE YOU-- BUT PEOPLE WHO NEED YOU NONETHELESS.
THE WORLD I OFFER IS NOT BEAUTIFUL-- BUT IT IS REAL--
--FAR MORE REAL THAN THE FANTASY YOU'RE LIVING NOW.
"YOU ARE NO GODDESS, ORORO. YOU ARE A MUTANT-- AND YOU HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES.
"COME WITH ME, CHILD. TASTE THE WORLD OUTSIDE. YOU MAY FIND ITS FLAVOR BITTER-- OR SURPRISINGLY SWEET."
YOU PRESENT A MOST PECULIAR ARGUMENT--YET I SENSE A DEEP SINCERITY IN YOUR WORDS.
ALL RIGHT, I WILL... COME WITH YOU.
PERHAPS THE TIME HAS COME FOR ME TO LEAVE THE NEST AT LAST.

Beyond the straightforwardly racist depiction of Kenyan society inherent to this entire beat, Xavier's framing of this decision, and Ororo's acquiescence to it, leave a bad taste in my mouth. For one thing, attacking her divinity is a quibble in the face of her functionality; she's more attentive and conscientious than many of the literal gods that exist in the setting. To call her current situation a "fantasy" feels off, as well– was the drought *not* a legitimate issue, hurting a lot of people? Was she *not* doing real, measurable good? Xavier's issue can't be the superfluous theatrics of her persona- he's here to recruit her as a costumed superhero. Maybe his issue is that her work is too localized? Maybe her "responsibilities" to the outside world involve working with Xavier to systemize her power use, to combat drought and climate change globally, or even to research and replicate her powers, so she won't be the sole bottleneck for the good they can do?

Of course not. Xavier's headhunting her because he needs humanoid artillery. The "real world" he's inviting her to join is choked with costumed maniacs who need smiting– and that's somehow less juvenile than the "fantasy" she's living now? Her immediate "mutant responsibilities" to the world aren't anything systemic; instead, she's got the rather specific, mutant-centric job of springing a bunch of her mutant brethren from an evil, vampiric living island. The "real world" problems which Xavier will set her against won't become more grounded from here.

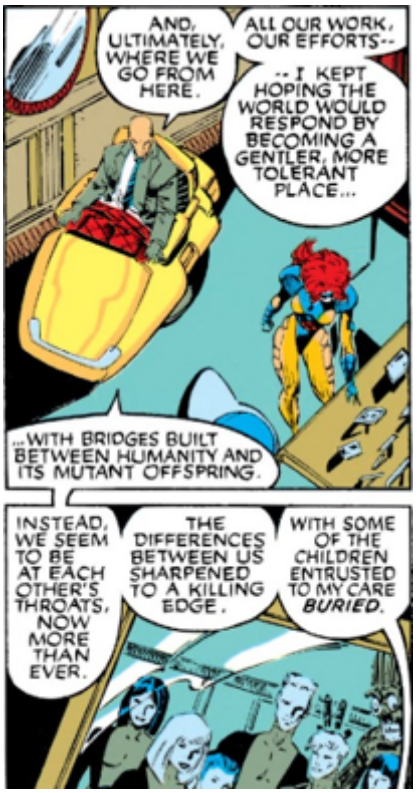
A frequent, foundational swipe taken at the superhero genre is that it can't substantially engage with real life politics or problems; superheroes either spend their time fighting fantastical threats that are orthogonal to real life issues, or fighting individual violent criminals while glossing over the systemic issues that produce crime. All superheroes receive this accusation to some extent, but the X-Men are uniquely susceptible because their runaround is couched in the kind of aspirational rhetoric that Xavier feeds to Storm. The team's brand requires them to champion an idealized future that can never actually arrive, or indeed, be formulated *too specifically,* lest it become *too* tied to its era of formulation; this cageyness is visible on a review of the team's behavior over time. The popular surface-level understanding of the X-franchise is that it's a civil rights metaphor, though the specific movement being paralleled shifts with the decade. The more accurate understanding is that the deliberate political coding was a retrofit introduced in the mid-1970s by Chris Claremont. In the 1960s, they were traditional superheroes in good standing, deputized by the FBI – barely counterculture, let alone radical.

The underlying politics of *that* team can't match the manifesto of the group that overthrew the human-supremacist Genoshan Government in 1990, or the politics of the group involved in the foundation of a Mutant psuedo-ethnostate in the 2020s. The actual practical goals towards which the X-Men are working will always be couched in vague platitudes informed by the zeitgeist. What they'll always have to fall back on, though – their most enduring success, the short term triage work that defined the teams charter before political conscientiousness was on the minds of anyone in the bullpen– is *self-policing.* In their 1963 debut, the point of the X-Men was to serve Humanity, sure, but not by *innovating* or ushering in Utopia. The point of the X-Men was to *counteract evil mutants.*


THAT'S WHAT I'VE WANTED TO ASK! JUST WHAT EXACTLY IS OUR REAL MISSION, SIR?
JEAN, THERE ARE MANY MUTANTS WALKING THE EARTH... AND MORE ARE BORN EACH YEAR!
NOT ALL OF THEM WANT TO HELP MANKIND!... SOME HATE THE HUMAN RACE, AND WISH TO DESTROY IT! SOME FEEL THAT THE MUTANTS SHOULD BE THE REAL RULERS OF EARTH! IT IS OUR JOB TO PROTECT MANKIND FROM THOSE... FROM THE EVIL MUTANTS!

Self-policing is laudable, when the group that's self-policing is defined by the ability to kill skyscrapers with a glance. It's not a political project, though. It's not a worldview. It's *definitely*

not compelling if you're running a utilitarian calculus on the existence of mutantkind, because it's a mission that wouldn't be necessary if mutant powers didn't exist at all. Charitably, it's the maintenance that you do in order to get enough breathing room to think about the future, but for the X-Men the future can't arrive. Some mutants like Storm are introduced using their powers to improve the world in smaller, concrete ways, but inevitably, they're drawn into the game of whack-a-mole, all forward motion stalled by a never-ending parade of crises that roll the boulder to the bottom of the hill. The X-Men have spent the better part of the 21st century in crisis mode, beating back existential threats to mutantkind – The Decimation, The Dark Reign, The Terrigen Cloud, The Fall of Krakoa – and when the fight is perpetually for survival and nothing else, the "Mutant Struggle" and "Xavier's Dream" can begin to feel insular; siloed from every real world issue they could be a metaphor for. Superhuman power and agency, directed towards nothing but its own survival. Krakoa is the closest they've ever gotten to an on-page manifesto of what a mutant political project might look like beyond treading water, and we're two years out from that going the only way editorial was gonna let *that* go.


AND, ULTIMATELY, WHERE WE GO FROM HERE.
ALL OUR WORK, OUR EFFORTS--
-- I KEPT HOPING THE WORLD WOULD RESPOND BY BECOMING A GENTLER, MORE TOLERANT PLACE...
...WITH BRIDGES BUILT BETWEEN HUMANITY AND ITS MUTANT OFFSPRING.
INSTEAD, WE SEEM TO BE AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS, NOW MORE THAN EVER.
THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN US SHARPENED TO A KILLING EDGE.
WITH SOME OF THE CHILDREN ENTRUSTED TO MY CARE BURIED.

Editorial. There's the magic word, the ever-present bugbear, the *real* reason nothing can amount to anything. *Editorial* needs things static so they can keep printing the books. *Editorial* is why the once-topical life circumstances of Claremont's initial X-Men lineup – like Magneto's zionism-inflected mutant separatism, or Colossus's communism – grow fuzzier in their specifics over time. *Editorial* is why the mutant struggle is doomed to be a siloed, myopic cage match that can never be too intersectional with real life civil rights struggles, or otherwise generate any widespread change that the wider Marvel Universe would have to consistently acknowledge. *Editorial* is why a world in which Ororo Munroe exists still suffers drought. There's nothing

intrinsic to the premise of the *X-Men* franchise that produces this dysfunction– it's all downstream of the serial publication model. It follows that in a unified timeline by a single author of vision, unbeholden to editorial whims– surely we'd get to see what powerhouses like Storm could *really* do for the world, right?

To which *The Power Fantasy* responds, "No, not really."

The Power Fantasy offers commentary on significant chunks of the superheroic tradition, but it's most prominently a pastiche of *X-Men.* For the purposes of the pastiche, Heavy stands in for Magneto, but the ways in which he's distinct from Magneto are telling. Like Magneto, he's a partisan and champion of his superpowered demographic; unlike Magneto, whose political concerns are usually (and conveniently) siloed to mutants and mutants alone, Heavy's ideas extend to what the Atomics ought to be collectively pushing for once they've secured their basic physical safety. When the U.S first tries to kill him in the 60s, he isn't leading a generic "Atomic Rights" rally – he's specifically trying to rally fellow Atomics against nuclear proliferation and the Vietnam War. When he pulverizes The Major, he isn't doing so out of a vague Atomic-supremacist stance – he's avenging the imperialist atrocities The Major has committed for the U.S. Government. He hates cops, he loves free-love, and his long term goal is the creation of another Superpower aligned with his politics, putting a thumb on the scale in favor of a "more leftist" world.

What does a "more leftist" world actually entail, though? What *can* it entail, if it's enforced by the fiat of a superpowered hereditary dynasty? Is Heavy a communist? If so, what kind? An anarchist? *Jacky* is expressly an anarchist, and he wrestles with the contradictions inherent to that label when he's wielding power the way that he does. Heavy never specifies. This isn't because he's insincere– he's bloodied the US government's nose, and been bloodied in turn, to a greater extent than anyone alive could dream of doing. Instead, I think that he has the *luxury* of never having to specify how he'd order the world, because that's always been academic for him. He's never operated without there being at least two other Superpowers who'd reign him in, should he really swing for the fences. Lux, by contrast, once had a very specific plan on how to order the world in the absence of anyone to stop him – a benevolent

tyranny-slash-hive-mind democracy enabled by his omnipathic abilities. In the company of other Superpowers, he instead puts his omnipathy towards the most pressing problem to which it's applicable – preventing his peers from having world-ending meltdowns. He had a dream once – far more specific than Xavier's – but circumstances drive him into that exact same game of self-policing Whack-a-Mole.

Most of the Superpowers are like this. With the exception of Masumi, they have abnormally fleshed-out political worldviews for their genre, and in comparison to the specific work that they're most directly in conversation with. Most of them have specific ways that they'd use their powers to change the world if they could. But their preoccupation with each other means that little has been structurally upended; the world of *The Power Fantasy* hasn't moved that far afield of the World Outside Your Window. Valentina's attempts to brute-force an end to the Cold War led to her being forced into seclusion in orbit; she provides standing protection against further nuclear exchange but she isn't especially proactive beyond that, and nuclear war isn't the same going concern it used to be. The Pyramid's technology is never shown being applied to any problem unrelated to The Superpowers; are there any numinous desalinators, terraforming machines, carbon scrubbers? Or are the wagons too tightly circled, limited resources directed purely towards checking the other superpowers, with Magus keeping a death-grip on anything truly world-upending for fear of the repercussions of letting it out? Lux and Heavy conspire to kill corrupt cops at a high enough rate that it shows up in the statistics, but without the leeway to upend the system further, it's just a leftist-flavored version of The Punisher endlessly murdering drug dealers. The Superpowers have killed *two U.S. Presidents* and this changed nothing; in fact, the second killing was an attempt to salvage the status quo. The biggest example of the superpowers permanently changing something about society, for better or for worse, is when their failure to stop The Queen resulted in the destruction of Europe. Even this feels analogous to the damage that the big crossovers at Marvel might tally up if the implicit human costs weren't lost in the editorial churn.

Eliza represents the epitome of this trend of incredible power finding itself in a closed loop. She sought power in the first place for the sole purpose of neutralizing The Queen, with no larger vision for her ideal world order; aside from a quick jaunt to rescue the Vatican, she appears to have cloistered herself for the following decade. At her level of power – and her implied instability in the face of damnation – there's a sense in which her inaction *is* something of incredible value to the world at large. At the same time, she *is* demonstrably capable of more. Her first big expenditure of power after defeating the Queen is to assist Dev with his plan to annihilate Lux; in order to trick the others into closing the stadium roof, she casually demonstrates the ability to manipulate the weather from halfway across the world.

Storm has demonstrated the obvious humanitarian applications of this ability, but there's no indication that Eliza pursues such things. Valentina parses the storm as one more example of Eliza exercising power to *set the tone* – exactly as inward-facing as the power she exerted to create her cathedral. But the real reason Eliza's doing it is the same as the reason she took power in the first place– to neutralize another superpower. Before she pivoted against Lux, she was a hair's breadth away from destroying Dev under the assumption he'd crossed a moral line by aligning with the U.S. military- again, only acting to neutralize another superpower. Like Storm, she emerges from divine seclusion for the express purpose of aiming artillery at her fellow superpowers, but it makes a bit more sense for her than it does for Ororo; more so than anyone who followed Valentina, she only *exists* the way she does in response to the existence of other superpowers. They're the problem that she brought herself into existence to solve.

In the back letter of issue 8, Gillen describes *TPF,* in the context of its relation to the superhero deconstruction tradition*,* as "the most traditional superhero comic on the shelves" – principally in relation to the book's monomaniacal exploration of great power and great responsibility. But another way in which it resembles traditional superhero comics is that it presents a more organic emergence of the same status quo deadlock in which the X-Men in particular so often find themselves- superhumanity at perpetual loggerheads, to the detriment of any possibility of systemic change. In keeping with the book's reification of Great Man Theory, this is attributed to specific characteristics of the people involved rather than to the genre conventions that they struggle under. The stalemate isn't editorially mandated- everyone involved is just that intrinsically durable and powerful. Their ideological disagreements are better-connected to the context of the 20th century than those of Xavier and Magnus, but no less intractable. Lux in particular has operated under the impression that this stalemate was inevitable- that the choice was between the unilateral world-warping tyranny of One or the

tense, unproductive deadlock of Several. But the thing about a creator-owned book in which Great Man Theory is true – wonderful and risky in equal measure – is that it's possible for someone to change their minds in a way that matters and *sticks.* For Ororo to have any chance of permanently returning to the fantasy in which she once lived, Marvel would need to burn to the ground. It's easy, in comparison, to picture Eliza deciding to use her damnation to purchase something of more utilitarian value than a glorified drone strike.

Art by Jack Xi

Heaven Is a Place on Earth

By Jason K Jones

“There needs to be a heaven on earth. For everyone.”
-The Queen, *The Power Fantasy #7*

In the timeline of *The Power Fantasy*, there have only been seven recognized Superpowers prior to 1999: Santa Valentina, Etienne Lux, Ray ‘Heavy’ Harris, Jacky Magus, Morishita Masumi, the Queen, and Eliza Hellbound. A few pretenders have emerged as well, but they lacked both the physical and mental durability necessary to survive a first strike by a rival Superpower, thus granting them a place in the eternal stalemate that Etienne dubs “the balancing act” in issue #1. At the end of 1999, an eighth Superpower appears to be poised to join the others: Alex ‘Kid Ignition’ Harris, Heavy’s son. Kid Ignition’s initiation into the Superpower club is marred by an attempted assassination of Etienne (although as of the end of issue #11, readers don’t know if anyone is aware the attempt failed). Before things get explodey, however, Kid Ignition sees firsthand that being a Superpower is more about accepting constraints than being able to throw your weight around.

This paradox of constraint by one’s own power is the core of *The Power Fantasy*. Our cast of Superpowers all fundamentally agree that the world should continue to exist and so they rely on this tacit understanding of one another to check themselves against doing anything that might jeopardize the planet.

Then in 1989 the Queen appears.

The Queen is an anomaly among the Superpowers, an extradimensional being whose origin cannot be ascertained by any methods available to the others. She appears fully formed in Manchester one day, giving off enough radiation that she could give everyone in the vicinity cancer, and explains when Valentina arrives to make first contact that she has come to make heaven on earth for everyone. Valentina, herself an extradimensional entity who arrived with a specific mission to protect the world, gets on board with the vision immediately.

What follows from this moment is perhaps the single greatest crisis the Superpowers collectively face in their fifty-five year history. The chief actors among the Superpowers, Valentina, Etienne, Heavy, and Jacky, are divided on whether the Queen represents a threat that needs to be managed or an opportunity to tangibly improve conditions on their very fragile ball of dirt. Their collective mission up to this point has been the balancing act, and the Queen is an obviously destabilizing factor. Valentina and Heavy are cautiously optimistic, seeing the Queen’s utopian vision as a chance to make more people happy. Etienne and Jacky take a more pessimistic view, citing the alien nature of the Queen and how incomprehensible her actual motivations are. When the Queen has an apparent mental collapse after realizing that she cannot achieve her goal, the question of whether to change the status quo gets interrupted by an immediate need to save reality from the Queen’s lashing out. While personal failures

haunt the older Superpowers, Jacky Magus and the Pyramid succeed in saving reality through immense sacrifice, including Jacky's apparent death and secret replacement by Dev, now Magus of an obliterated Pyramid; the descension of Eliza Hellbound, binding her soul to extradimensional hell in exchange for the power necessary to mercy kill the flailing Queen; and the complete destruction of Europe.

It's a bad day for everyone.

This event, dubbed the Second Summer of Love, hangs over everyone in 1999. A proactive Superpower emerged, and she couldn't cope when she failed in her mission. Where does that leave the other Superpowers? How do they cope themselves as they continue to sustain the balancing act, understanding intrinsically now just how fragile it is? They're acting as guardians of the planet, but to what end? The Queen's stated vision appealed to at least half of the active Superpowers in 1989. She failed and flamed out spectacularly. Was this a problem with her vision or with her personal standards? Does that kind of planet-threatening self-destruction await any other Superpowers who dare to let their reach exceed their grasp? Is it worth the risk to try to make something better of the world?

It may be useful to divide the six Superpowers into three distinct generations with differing visions for the world. In the first generation, we have Valentina and Etienne who fundamentally agree that maintaining a stable status quo is more important than any other concerns. Valentina arrives declaring her mission of saving everyone. Later, when she first meets Etienne, she suggests that the specific threat she's guarding against is nuclear annihilation. They form a friendship around this shared goal, although Etienne develops his own theory about existential threats to the planet, namely that the only way to ensure that he and Valentina can effectively respond to them is to become worldwide benevolent despots. These two are the old guard among the Superpowers, people who prioritize stability above all else. Valentina, who prizes free will for humanity much more than Etienne (perhaps because she sees the timeline as the only place in existence where it's even possible) is conflicted about this approach, and takes radical action in moments of extreme distress, but she and Etienne are generally in agreement about not rocking the boat. They see their responsibility as ensuring there continues to be an Earth where a heaven can eventually be established, although they leave that vision for the future up to other people.

In the second generation are Heavy and Jacky Magus. While Heavy is of a similar age to Etienne, his debut as a Superpower with a clear political agenda aligns him more closely with the slightly younger anarchist magician who emerges a few years later. Heavy proclaims his agenda proudly: he wants better treatment for the growing Atomic population, people who develop extranormal abilities as they mature, and he wants to counter the American imperial project that grows in scope as the Cold War drags on. Heavy describes himself as a leftist and eventually disavows his American roots to found Haven, the traveling Atomic nation-state. His ideals are fundamentally progressive with a strong focus on protecting his preferred group. Jacky provides a paradoxical counterpoint, as his anarchist politics are even more radical than Heavy's, but he accumulates power through a strictly hierarchical cult system that leaves him

vulnerable to co-opting by established power structures (as his successor Dev realizes and embraces in the 1990s). The cult is necessary to both lock down access to magic and to allow Jacky to become powerful enough to be reckoned with by the other Superpowers. He understands this paradox and copes with it by arguing that his Atomic ability of knowing things makes him uniquely suited to acquire power for the sake of giving anarchism a seat at the global table. He hates that this is the conclusion he has reached. In these two figures, we have Superpowers who want to change the world. They have clearly stated goals and visions for how they think things could be better, and consequently, they are the two most politically active. The series's precipitating crisis is a moment of posturing by Heavy being aggressively countered using technology that Dev, masquerading as Jacky, covertly supplied to the American government. Where the first generation focuses only on preservation, Heavy and Jacky (and later Dev) ascend with distinct visions of how to make the world better, although they both find themselves caught up in machinations to increase their power rather than actively using it to make improvements related to their stated goals.

The third generation of Superpowers consists of the two who would most like to be left alone to live their lives in peace. Morishita Masumi has no ambitions towards power. While her kaiju form grants her a level of social privilege that she couldn't attain otherwise, she understands that the privilege is an artificial construct designed to keep the rest of the world safe from her. She'd rather just be an artist, focused on exploring what her unique circumstances mean for herself and the world. Eliza Hellbound contrasts Masumi in her decisive embrace of power. While she enters the story as a member of the Pyramid trying to climb the ranks, ostensibly aligned with Jacky's stated purpose, her moment of Superpower accession comes in response to a crisis. In the midst of the Second Summer of Love, with Valentina neutralized for unknown reasons, Eliza makes the decision to damn herself so that someone can kill the Queen. She takes power for a specific, limited purpose, and then she appears to have no more interest in exercising it, an ironic turn since Eliza most likely joined the Pyramid to achieve a specific goal of world improvement in the first place. Instead she cloisters herself away, relying on her Catholic faith to sustain her as she anticipates the eventual realization of her damnation. For both of these women, their vision is intensely personal, mostly because they rightly understand that their attainment of power imposes remarkable restrictions on them.

It becomes more clear with this generational schema to see how the Superpowers respond to the trauma of the Queen's Second Summer of Love. Etienne and Valentina's general conservatism towards interfering with global politics turns into them being more controlling about how the other Superpowers behave, with Etienne citing his general inability to take action during a crisis besides pain mitigation for victims and Valentina being shaken by her personal failures in seeing the threat the Queen posed. Dev Magus, having witnessed the sacrifices the Pyramid had to make to stop the Queen's destruction, has betrayed Jacky's anarchist ideals in favor of doubling down on American imperialism in order to ensure his own survival. Masumi slept through the crisis at Etienne's direction, once again finding herself no more than a liability. Eliza took enough power to make a difference to the world, but the cost has paralyzed her will to do anything further. Heavy's response to the Second Summer of Love

is the least apparent, but he has stayed the course with his plan of raising his son to be an ally in the complicated web of Superpower politics. If there is a clear conclusion to draw from the Queen's appearance, it's that she underlined to all of the Superpowers how little power they have to pursue any kind of utopian vision if they want to live to see it.

While the first three generations of Superpowers represent a range of visions for the world from aggressive conservatism to radical progressivism to yearning for the ability to simply find personal satisfaction, Kid Ignition sits on the edges of the story, eagerly waiting for his chance to take his place among his Superpowered peers. He is young and impulsive, apparently unscarred by the events of the Second Summer of Love, and questions remain about what his vision for the world could entail. He's spent eighteen years living inside a bubble, and now he gets to learn about the world at the same moment he assumes the power to shape it. Heavy hopes his son will act as a reinforcement for his own leftist politics, but as everyone knows, it's the rare child that perfectly mirrors the values of their parents. Questions remain about what vision of heaven is knocking around inside Kid Ignition's fiery head, whether it's something we've already seen or something radically new. Regardless, the most salient question he may end up posing is this: what good is a status quo that makes nobody happy?

Art by Jack Xi

Lux and Longtermism

By Rose Crown

How bad would it be if all of humanity perished in the fires of nuclear war?

Most people would agree this would be a very bad outcome but the philosopher Derek Parfit, in his seminal book *Reasons and Persons*, raised an argument that this outcome would be even worse than most appreciated. He posed a comparison of three scenarios:

1. Peace
2. 99% of humanity die in nuclear war
3. 100% of humanity die in nuclear war.

Most people would agree that 1 is the best of those options and that 3 is the worst but is the difference between peace and 99% of humanity dying versus 99% of humanity dying and 100% of humanity dying greater?

Parfit argues that though while for many the difference between 1 and 2 may intuitively seem more significant the larger difference is actually between 2 and 3. This is because if 100% of humanity dies what is lost is not just the humans who exist today but the much larger number of future lives that could exist across the entire future span of the entirety of human history.

The transhumanist Nick Bostrom developed Parfit's argument in a more grandiose direction that presaged the current longtermist movement. Bostrom would argue that every day that humanity had not colonised the Virgo Supercluster and filled it with happy lives was an astronomical waste. He didn't however argue for speeding towards colonising the universe despite the lost opportunity cost that horrified him but instead for taking every step necessary to protect the cradle of the galactic civilisation that he imagined growing from Earth.

The longtermist community has roots in utilitarianism, transhumanism and existing concerns about existential risks. They were convinced by the type of argument Bostrom made and see positively influencing the far future of humanity as the key moral priority of our time. The longtermists see the far future as a particular pressing issues for our time for two reasons. They believe that the development of new technology has led to new existential risks from nuclear war to biotechnology to AI and the world is therefore at risk like never before. They also view the present as a pivotal moment where there is a greater opportunity than in the past to shape the long run future of humanity. The focus on the future as their key moral priority has led to longtermists facing accusations of neglecting the present.

At first glance a philosophy aimed at averting the extinction of humanity founded in utilitarian views would seems to be one that would fit Etienne Lux but if we consider him further he appears less ideologically aligned with them than you would expect.

It is Valentina who seeks to preserve the "music of the future", Jacky who holds steadfast belief that ordinary humans will get there if they're just given time, and Heavy who builds Haven and frets about who will protect Atomics after he's gone. Etienne, by contrast, thinks of the future relatively seldomly. He doesn't ignore it, but it isn't his overriding concern when he works to prevent the mass deaths that

Superpowers can cause with his concern being at least as focused on the immediate destruction they can bring.

Even in the first pages of the series, where his proposal for world domination gives more focus to the future than he does elsewhere he is still primarily concerned with the near term. His long term plan for a "psychic quasi-democratic model" is an afterthought, something to be fleshed out later, compared to the overriding immediate threat of billions of people dying. Lux does not raise arguments about the paramount importance of future lives when he discusses saving the world and outlines his utilitarian views.

Lux also differs from longtermists in he is scrupulous about minimising the extent of the harm he causes in the short term. Lux is perfectly willing to do terrible things but remains almost obsessively focused on avoiding acting unethically in so far as possible.

Other than when dealing directly with the other Superpowers, when Lux takes actions outside the bounds of accepted morality he strives to use as light a touch as possible and puts off acting until necessary to avert imminent disaster. This can be seen in his physic control of those surrounding Masumi. He only alters the critic Olivia Brown when Masumi is on the verge of exploding. Rather than rewriting Isabella at will, he waits until she asks and uses nudges instead of larger changes. Longtermist ideology would, with the future at stake, see proactively making larger changes as justified.

I can. Small tweaks are relatively easy. It keeps your personality intact.
Gross changes are obvious, and more unethical.
But a little nudge is easy, and often necessary to ease Masumi's path through life.

In addition to this lack of ideological alignment with longtermism Lux is increasingly pushed by circumstances to focus on the short term to the exclusion of the long term.

Lux being pushed into this short term focus begins when he sets aside his plans for world domination for the balancing act. Rather than making long term plans we often see Lux reacting to immediate threats or perceived threats; in this respect he arguably plays the closest to the role of a traditional superhero of any character in The Power Fantasy. Lux is willing to act proactively against Superpowers but this stems from the fact that as far as Lux is concerned any Superpower is an *immediate* walking threat to the safety of the world.

This focus on these immediate threats underlies many of Lux's actions. He is far from Adrian Veidt with a grand plan to save the world forever. Lux understands that his balancing act is an ongoing process without an end. It requires saving the world again and again so he focuses on addressing immediate threats instead of planning how to save the world once and for all.

Lux's focus on the short term is not without its drawbacks. The clearest illustration of this is his handling of Masumi. Lux considers every time Masumi gets upset as a risk to millions or even billions of people and concludes that he needs to ensure that she is never upset. That she is never confronted with "unpalatable truths".

It is hard to fault his logic in any individual instance. He is right that it is a terrible risk and yet the consequences of him doing this are leaving Masumi emotionally stunted and ensuring that because of that she will remain just as much as a risk as ever. Lux sees doing otherwise as unacceptably flipping a coin with the faith of the world at stake. An unacceptable risk. So rather than helping Masumi develop coping skills and gain experience in handling distress Lux instead ensures she is kept shielded from anything that could hurt her.

You flip a coin and it turns up heads, it means nothing more than "you were lucky."
To flip a coin at all when the stakes are so high?
Truth is a luxury my ethics cannot afford.

Until eventually Lux misses a beat, and she is confronted by Isabella. Lux isn't wrong that this was a coin flip in the moment but working through it left Masumi a little better adjusted, closer to her girlfriend and a little better able to handle the next time she's risking dissociating until she turns into a Kaiju. Isabella, quite unintentionality was able to make the world safer from Masumi in a way that Lux's short term reactive planning was never able to do.

We see this tendency present itself in Lux's belief that in conflict between Superpowers "first strike is the only hope". We see it when he argues that they should kill the Queen if they have the opportunity. We see it again when we learn he argued for Masumi's death and is only convinced otherwise due to practical concerns.

To understand Lux's reasoning here we need to make a brief digression into game theory. Game theory is the mathematical study of strategic interactions. The originator of the field John Von Neumann was also a believer in first strikes. He advocated bombing Russia before they could develop nuclear capabilities and become a threat to his adopted home country of the USA. He infamously suggested "if you say why not bomb them tomorrow, I say why not today? If you say today at 5 o'clock, I say why not one o'clock?"

Game theory distinguishes between one-shot and iterated games. One-shot games are ones which are played once and then done with nothing outside that instance taken into account whereas iterated games are repeated multiple times.

The distinction is simple to explain but can be easy to miss in practice. The paper that introduced a famous game The Prisoner's Dilemma (the specifics of which do not concern us here) involved the game being played repeatedly and ends with a footnote by John Nash (pp. 24-25) arguing that this amounted to

"having the players play one large multimove game... If this experiment were conducted with various different players rotating the competition and with no information given to a player of what choices the others have been making until the end of all the trials, then the experimental results would have been quite different, for this modification of procedure would remove the interaction between the trials." (emphasis in original) If the game is repeatedly with the same person or the players have information about the past games of the person they are playing against it stops being a one-shot game and becomes an iterative one instead.

Considering this the mistake Etienne is making becoming clear. He is viewing his conflicts with other Superpowers as a one-shot game when they are actually an iterative game. Conflict between Superpowers can only ever be a one-shot game if there are only two Superpowers. Etienne shows his willingness to act via first strike again and again. Every time he does so he is providing information that the players of future games with him will take into account in their own strategies.

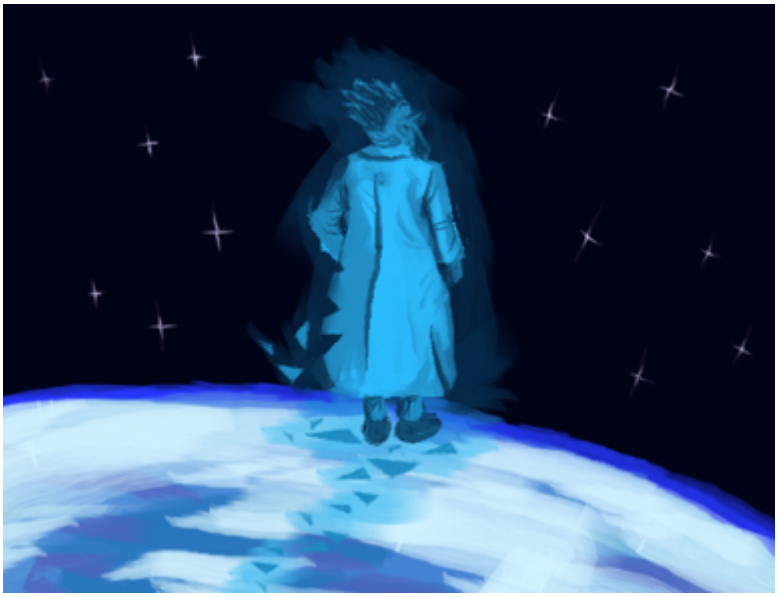
We see this come to pass when Eliza learns the truth that Dev is alive, has replaced Jacky Magus and while attempting to grow to the strength of a Superpower is vulnerable for now. From knowing the results of how Lux has played the game in the past Eliza and Dev both conclude that if Etienne learns the truth about Dev's vulnerability that he will kill him in a first strike. Their belief about how Etienne will act leads them to conclude that they have no option but to preempt his first strike with a lethal first strike of their own.

The decisions taken in each individual instance are, as is so often the case with Etienne, easy to see the logic of, but their cumulative effect led to a scenario where Eliza felt she had no option but to kill him. Any other emerging Superpower who feared Lux would carry out a first strike on them would be backed into a similar corner.

In Etienne’s defence this is far from his ideal scenario. It’s shown from the beginning of issue #1 that this is Plan B because Valentina would not go along with Plan A of taking over the world. Etienne understands the balancing act as something that is fundamentally unsustainable that becomes more so with each additional Superpower introduced. He just does not think there is any alternative. Lux for all of his short term focus isn’t so blinded that he doesn’t understand the need for a sustainable solution.

Though he shows some awareness of the limitations of his approach in Etienne's focus on maintaining the balance between the Superpowers there's another balancing act he neglects - balancing the short and long term. He doesn't balance stopping Masumi exploding now with developing her coping skills in the long term. He doesn't balance first striking the potential threat of new Superpowers with the risk he is creating of somebody deciding that they need to first strike Lux before he first strikes them. He fails to balance these short and long term considerations and in the end that is what almost gets him killed.

Lux survived but if he is to succeed going forward, he will need to chart a new path that avoids both his previous excessive short term focus and longtermist neglect of the present.



Art by Jack Xi

The Shipping Forecast

Art by Anna Teske

The superpowers can't fight, but can they f— … ind one another attractive? A huge group of us got together to talk about the relationships of The Power Fantasy and whether any of them have a future. And boy, it went places.

With contributions from: Ariavar (AR), Calliope (CE), Jason K Jones (JKJ), Matteo Marcenaro (MM), Max (ML), Megafire (MF), Roscoe G. (RG), Rose Crown (RC), Tamsyn Elle (TE), Walter O'Brien (WOB)
Loosely coordinated and lightly edited by Tamsyn Elle

	DEV/ELIZA
JKJ	They are the platonic ideal of a doomed straight goth couple. I thought it was Morrigan/Baphomet in WicDiv, but DevLiza has levels of doomedness that you can only get when you're a middle aged couple who only love each other, mesh shirts, and black vinyl.
AR	No one is doing the “divorced while married” energy like them.
WOB	They're divorced, they’re married, they’re mutually widowed, they’ve just met, they’ve never known each other. They’re in a love quadrangle involving god and a dead atheist cult leader.
AR	A threesome with Jacky wouldn’t have fixed them, but would make everything way funnier.
TE	They do seem incredibly doomed but that just makes me hope those crazy kids pull through somehow. (Ship name: Devil, In Disguise)
WOB	If Eliza used a strap it could be Devil in dis guy.
AR	I find them more appealing than Morrigan and Baphomet tbh but I’m having difficulties putting my finger on the way, I feel like their type of toxicity and flaws have more nuance? And the way they are doomed in an individual way AND together.
WOB	Well in the Morrigan and Baphomet relationship there was one person who was clearly more in the wrong. DevEl is a lot more balanced in terms of who does things that hurt who.
MF	It *is* kind of fascinating how Dev 'tempts' Eliza into foregoing her principles. He really does make her worse, but I'm not quite sure if she makes *him* worse, too.
WOB	Well, the only reason she became a superpower in the first place is because she convinced Dev to forgo HIS principles way back when.
MF	By which I'm saying Dev is certainly short for 'Devil' in this relationship.
TE	The two of them teaming up after Dev's reveal is definitely quite the DevEl-opment
RG	At the risk of incurring the wrath of a particular other contributor to this wonderful zine, they’re a triangle power couple. A triangle helmet, triangle hair, a triangle cult, triangle tattoos, triangular clothes cut-outs! Long live the 3 sided king and queen!!
MF	She *did* get him to betray his promises to Jacky, true, but it's very funny that *ethically* Dev seems to have sold his soul to Hell much more than Eliza did.
WOB	They’re kind of the nadir of the central question posed to all of the Superpowers “are you a person with wants and needs or are you an embodiment of something larger than yourself?”
MM	I already went into TPF loving Magus and Eliza aesthetically and conceptually speaking, and the reveals of how much they're tied together (and their messy rekindling) was so good. I'd also like to mention that from my general understanding (i.e. catechism) of church sex rules, pegging isn't exactly as off the table as anal. Fanfic writers, do with that knowledge, and with the knowledge of Eliza's body reshaping powers, what you will.

	MASUMI/ISABELLA
JKJ	The most doomed lesbian couple I've ever seen. I want the world for them, but I fear they have only heartbreak in their future. I am obsessed with Isabella's ambivalence towards her relationship with Masumi.
RG	Beyond doomed. So doomed that their present situation is, in fact, doom itself. I also love them both immensely. Maybe the most intensely relatable part of the whole book to me, as someone who is very capable of being both a Masumi and Isabella in the worst possible ways. I am fascinated by the psychosexuality of their whole dynamic which Etienne points out. There's something very Cronenberg Crash-y about Isabella being in love with a Superpower after her experiences with the SSoL
WOB	Yeah! Also that moment where Isabella's talking about the thoughts she would have about the end of the world she says "when Heavy tore a continent loose, or Valentina let rip, or…something else" MASUMI WAS SOMETHING ELSE. Isabella was thinking about Masumi before they ever met. Isabella is sort of living out a "sold to one direction" esque fantasy, if one direction could also end the world
MF	I keep finding it interesting how much Masumi looks to Isabella for cues on how to deal with the other Superpowers. It adds an interesting wrinkle to their dynamic, and a possible way out of the, ah, obvious doom hanging over their relationship.
MM	Fully second the doomed part, if a bit too much for me. Call it Italian-to-Italian protection instincts, but I want Isabella to get away and survive this, though I'm sure that won't happen.
WOB	I want to say that I'm very curious about what their sex life is like.
CE	I have a strong feeling Masumi is a bottom with Isabella ending up a service top but then at a certain point Masumi feels guilty and switches because she doesn't want Isabella just doing it to keep her happy
MF	Yeah, I think Isabella *wants* to bottom and indulge in some of her weirder monsterfucker fantasies, but obviously she can't tell *Masumi* about those, lest she take it the wrong way… (Unless we think Isabella's, ah, complicated relationship with danger expresses itself in a more dommy way, with her wanting to see how far she can push someone dangerous until they snap? That's a fantasy I can imagine her having.)
TE	My takes on sub/dom top/bottom dynamics among the core six: Etienne: would be the ultimate service top if he let himself Heavy: sub-ish switch in his secret heart who does dom top out of a sense of obligation Eliza: power bottom Dev: sub top Masumi: somewhat bratty bottom with guilt issues Valentina: safest power top known to mankind

Art by Jack Xi

	HEAVY/TONYA
JKJ	Tonya! You are too good for that man!
MF	I don't think either of them are particularly looking for romance in that dynamic, which is probably for the best.
TE	Ship name: Bedded Reporter
TE	I kinda imagine Heavy's more likely to be catching feelings here than Tonya is. Tonya feels too smart, and I get the feeling Heavy falls in love real easily. He's a great big open wound that way. And other ways.
WOB	I think it’s interesting how the first time they sleep together, it’s Tonya trying to think about something other than the end of the world, and then the next day she meets Kid Ignition.
MF	I mean, I hope Tonya sticks around him for a bit still, because she seems willing to call him out when he's being kind of bad at being a dad, which is something Heavy *really* needs to hear and isn't getting from anyone else.
WOB	I want to see Tonya interacting with some of the women of the cast. She’s spent the whole plot so far orbiting men.
MF	As an outsider he has to (*wants to*) justify his decisions to, Tonya plays a really important role in Haven at the moment, and I think she intends to make the most of that, but yeah, I don't see her interest here as romantic at all.
TE	In issue #2 Heavy mentions Haven's weird sex shit, but so far he's just a cult leader banging members of his cult, so it'll be interesting to see if they do get weird with it at some point
MF	I think we have a somewhat different understanding of 'weird sex shit' than most people would, to be honest, because I think the 'free love' stuff already counts for most.

TE	Well that's the thing, is it free love over there? Is there some kinda polycule going on?
MF	I think so? That's the general vibe I got from the place, and Heavy has stuck to the hippy 'free love' aesthetic pretty well so far.
WOB	Yeah I get the sense that Heavy becomes infatuated very easily, and sort of creates very clear narratives around people and then gets frustrated when people don't follow them. Like he's definitely picturing himself as like "a strong heroic guy who's rescued Tonya from the restrictions of her life and shown her how to embrace her true self as an Atomic" while Tonya's idea of what's going on is much more like "I'm here to do some investigative journalism and also fuck this really hot guy when I feel like it"
MF	Which I'm sure will go great when she leaves!
WOB	Of course!
RC	I do think Heavy has probably through painful experience grown to be self aware about his tendency to get caught up in self-image. Like when he meets Tonya he has the "You're safe now. I love saying shit like that" moment and then the "I'm not just that guy any more" comment in their first real conversation. He's often more reflective than he seems
WOB	I think everyone being a little bit self-aware and self-referential about their bad patterns but still doing them anyway is kind of Gillen's default mode of character writing.
MM	I think there's untapped potential as we go on with this. We're in for one hell of an issue if Heavy's smitten (as he probably is, I agree with everyone saying he seems like he falls easily) and Tonya's shown herself willing to call superpowers out on their bullshit (and doesn't seem that likely to consider this more than a hookup)
	VALENTINA
TE	Valentina and The Queen: do we think they explored each others bodies?
RC	I feel like Manchester during the Second Summer of Love probably makes Haven look sexually restrictive. Which is to say 100% yes.
WOB	Since my current working theory is that most angels are dispassionate overlords who've been groundhogging Earth timelines to watch them inevitably get destroyed, I've also been thinking that maybe Queen and Valentina were lovers in a previous timeline, and the methods they used to break into the current timeline left both of them amnesiac. Also tying into my Queen as reincarnation theory.
MF	Because the way Valentina and the Queen are framed when we see them together seem to indicate a... different kind of intimacy? I'm not sure their relationship was *sexual*, basically.
WOB	Yeah it might be in kind of an undefinable bosom friends area.
MF	Yeah, and it was certainly enough to hold Valentina back from fighting the Queen before the Queen could shunt her away. That said, *could* the Queen have killed her and didn't want to?

WOB	I’m guessing yes, but it’s hard to say.
JKJ	My working theory of Valentina is that she loves having a physical body and she's happy to explore what that means with anyone that she feels connected to and who is willing. Which is to say, I wouldn't be surprised if she and the Queen were Gals who were Pals. Going further back, the impression I take from the New Mexico bombing is that Valentina was fully into the free love movement when she was younger, and she very likely misses being able to enjoy that kind of casual physical intimacy after she retreats to space. SSoL had to have been this incredible moment of release for her after twenty years of enforced isolation
MM	I am gonna say yes, they were gal pals. But I don't think it's a type of bond as easily expressed as "romantic" or "sexual"-- I definitely agree with the idea that they're extraphysical beings now embodied and exploring those bodies, but also the fellowship of finally someone sharing your perspective on the world mixed in there.
JKJ	On the subject of other pairings, I think Valentina is the kind of personality that would pair well with any of the cast, honestly. It's more a question of whether they would be into her. For the most part, I'd say yes, although Eliza gives such straight vibes that I'm not sure she'd be interested in a romantic relationship with Val. They're definitely besties, although I think both of them kind of rue this fact
WOB	I still like Val and Eliza as an endgame. Are they besties? I’d say Valentina and Etienne are the most besties of any pair of the Superpowers. Textually Val and Eliza seem amicable but not that incredibly close. And also not even than amicable, actually.
RC	Eliza doesn't necessarily give me straight vibes but I do think she's too Catholic™ to have sex with a women even if she was attracted to them (she won't even do anal because it might be a sin). God the Power Fantasy but Eliza is gay would be incredibly depressing.
WOB	That’s why they’re endgame! I don’t think Eliza has much angst around gay people. She’s Catholic, sure, but she was also in the pyramid. I really don’t think Jacky would’ve let homophobes into the pyramid.
RC	I don't think she's anything like an anti-gay crusader but I think she'd struggle with it if she was queer herself. Like she seems to consider the Church's teaching on sexual morality as relevant to her sex life even if she also jokes about them.
WOB	I guess. I don’t know, I could see her having angst around being gay, but not in the way where she wouldn’t be able to admit or acknowledge having gay feelings. If that makes sense
JKJ	This is why I say they rue being besties. Valentina clearly is the only person who goes to talk to Eliza regularly, and Eliza enjoys their chats in some weird twisted way. At the very least, Eliza sees Valentina as her bestie. It's entirely possible Valentina is just too nice to put some distance between them, but there's something about how Eliza rightfully concludes that she can distract Valentina by asking for some girl talk the day before the birthday party that suggests to me that they do take each other's emotional well-being seriously beyond "don't blow up the world please",
WOB	Valentina certainly takes Eliza’s emotions into consideration. Eliza starts their first on panel conversation by asking Valentina to relive the worst experience of her life.

JKJ	I'm not saying they're good at being besties. Eliza is definitely your toxic friend who sucks all the air out of the room when she's around. Valentina just doesn't need to breathe.
MM	While I do see the general aesthetic appeal (it’s ineffable husbands but cold war yuri but superheroes), I also just didn't find that much interest in their interactions.
WOB	Can we talk about Valentina and Etienne? What’s their deal? Did anything ever actually happen there?
TE	(Is this ship just an excuse to make Saint Etienne jokes? It's not *not*.)
JKJ	I think Etienne was super into Valentina once he hit puberty, and then the whole "I should kill you" thing put him off for the rest of his life
MM	I've been a strong headcanoner since issue 1 that they've hooked up. Possibly multiple times. But they were young, they eventually stopped (not necessarily bc of the "I should kill you" thing, but they did at some point) and now they're just friends who've seen each other naked.
WOB	I’ve mentioned it before, but I also think Heavy and Valentina probably hooked up at some point. They’re the two sluttiest Superpowers, to put it bluntly
	ETIENNE
TE	What other pairings do we like for Etienne?
JKJ	While I think Etienne would be happier if he embraced his inner horn dog, there are a lot of genuine ethical questions surrounding someone with his abilities engaging in a romantic/sexual relationship. His partner would need to be someone who is immune to his control, which is probably why he gravitates towards Valentina. Heavy seems like he'd be a viable option as well, but they don't vibe the same as Xavier and Magneto do in X-Men, despite those characters being obvious inspirations
RG	I think Etienne and The Signal could have been an incredible couple (or is it a polycule if one partner is millions of consciousnesses?). Ship Name = Brainwave
MF	Yeah, I like the idea of Etienne feeling a strong connection to the Signal.
MM	Etienne liking anyone that isn't Val or Magus is probably deeply unethical. Which does actually make me want a fanfic about the *latter* option... (*Ed: don't worry, we get to that)*
	KID IGNITION
TE	Is his thing with the Atomic girl that got interrupted by Heavy and Tonya a big deal or just casual? (Ship name: Getting Tail)
MF	I think it's just casual, because Haven is a free love sex cult (that he grew up in, which *does* raise some questions), and he doesn't come across as, like, overly embarrassed, which I think he would've been if this was someone he *also* had a crush on? Then again, how much privacy has he had throughout his life?

WOB	I think it’s casual, but his use of “we” in “we weren’t expecting visitors” does read as kind of couple-ish to me, like she’s in there with KI pretty often.
ML	Actually, how many people his age can there even be in Haven? That he actually knows?
WOB	Hard to say. How much of Haven’s population is rescues like Tonya, and how much is the kids and grandkids of the generation that built it in the first place?
ML	That adds an extra layer to both his loneliness, and their relationship. She basically can't leave, ever, due to being one of the few people in the world who knows he exists. Which has actually made it somewhat compelling to me now...
JKJ	They have to be people who joined voluntarily. Heavy notes that Atomics don't seem to reliably have Atomic children, which is part of what makes Kid so unusual
WOB	Oh, right. Honestly I wonder what happens if two Atomics on Haven do have a normal kid. Does the kid get to stay? Can someone be “culturally Atomic” without powers? I guess the inner circle must all be people that Heavy (and maybe Kid's blue-harired mom) approve of. Which kind of sucks, because it means KI’s never gotten to sleep with anyone his parents would disapprove of, which should be a rite of passage.
JKJ	Seems like Kid's due for an Atomic Rumspringa now that he's allowed out of the bubble
WOB	I just realized that’s basically what I find interesting about Kid. He’s all decked out in an aesthetic of rebellion, but actually has his whole life dictated by other people.
JKJ	I imagine that his romantic relationships are limited in much the same way they are for any teenager in high school. There are the peers that he's moderately compatible with, but without being able to explore a larger dating pool it's probably more a situation of good enough partners.
ML	Although a high school probably has a lot more teenagers. Even if Heavy's rescuing Atomics all over the place, he still has a lot fewer options for friends his own age - let alone non-platonic relationships
JKJ	Yeah, seeing as we don't really know the size of Haven's population, it's probably an even more acute problem for Kid than a typical 1500 student school
WOB	I guess what I’m wondering is how Heavy even finds these kids, though? With Tonya he had Etienne helping him out, but that was kind of a special case. Is there a Haven helpline you can call? And by extension, I’m curious what the devil tail girl’s story is.
JKJ	Maybe? Haven had to be extremely expensive to build, so I assume Heavy has the resources to set up infrastructure for recruiting Atomics who want to get away from their homes.
MM	I think it's informal (mostly bc I don't see anyone in Haven really doing formal stuff, so Kid might not even know what boyfriend *means*) but regular due to that "we" other people have mentioned. exclusive? depends imo on how many kids are in Haven, which isn't really something we can answer easily.
	CRACKSHIPS

ML	JACKYDEVLIZA in a hypothetical "Jacky lives" scenario is endlessly funny to me. Even platonically, the dynamic would be "cult leader dies heroically, comes back to discover his last two disciples have totally fucked everything up". I also think it's fascinating, because Jacky's secrets basically made him the World's Loneliest Man, even surrounded with people. And in this situation, he'd be faced with the first people in decades to truly understand the choices he made, and why. And this puts them in a Mexican Standoff due to the nature of power. You might be wondering, "how could that ever become non-platonic?" Well, YOU try being stuck in a hermetically sealed building arguing with and trying to outwit your (attractive) former cult leader/disciple who gave up everything for what they cared about, and see how YOU fare.
MF	I wanna throw in Jackytienne. Jacky's entire reason to want to be a Superpower, to become the antithesis of his ideology, is to oppose Superpowers as, like, a thing, and he clearly thinks less of Valentina for not having killed Etienne after he proposed taking over the world. Yet what Etienne said in that very conversation is that it is unethical for any Superpower to exist in the first place, so killing them both *would* be best, were it not for the fact that they cannot guarantee no future Superpowers would pop up. I want to see them have that conversation and also fuck nasty about it.
ML	Yessss
MF	Like, this is a conclusion they *both* came to, but Etienne rejected it for a reason we never saw Jacky's answer to, and I want to see where they'd end up together if they truly grappled with that philosophical conundrum.
WOB	I'm more interested in them grappling with each other.
ML	I want to see both of these things.
MF	Well, one will be the symbolism of the other, of course.
ML	Is which of them tops also symbolic, do you think?
WOB	"There's one guy on earth who you, by your own ethical framework, would be allowed to fuck, and he hates you" is kind of a hilarious setup
MF	*Precisely.*
WOB	Insane psychosexual imagery where Jacky makes Etienne wear a Pyramid mask while they're fucking.
ML	Holy shit. Etienne could never agree to it, because they're psychic blockers. But imagine Jacky asking
MF	I think they'd both struggle to be vulnerable with one another, trying to keep the argument rational and the sex physical, yet as it goes on and they can't get what they want out of it, they *have* to show more and more of themselves, fighting to win the argument and stay on top, wrestling with one another and with themselves, what they hate about each other and what it shows them about themselves. A gloriously messy mix of the cerebral and the physical that leaves them both exhausted, but are they also... satisfied? They agree to meet up again next week.

ML	How have you made me actually ship this? What sorcery is this? We already got a fascinating insight into their dynamic with the Signal scene. But also, imagine how Etienne would feel when he finds out what really happened in SSOL. Also, the feeling of rejection right after SSOL that he has to edit out of his own brain.
TE	Jackytienne definitely has something. "The Two Smartest Guys In The Bed"
WOB	The “two smartest guys in the room” line is kind of funny now that we know it’s coming from Dev, a guy of completely average intelligence.
MF	It *is* darkly funny if Dev knows about that dynamic and genuinely has to consider whether he can get away with *not* fucking Etienne after the SSoL. (He uses the emotional fallout as the 'reason' for 'Jacky' to break off the relationship, because Etienne will *definitely* notice the quality of the argument dropping if he tries to keep it up.)
WOB	Etienne and Valentina dishing about their situationships. “You know this is going to end badly, don’t you?” “Funny, I was just about to tell you the same thing.”
MM	I'm glad this fandom seems to be of one mind. Also if Jacky and Etienne fuck, there needs in my opinion to be at east one time where Etienne tries to use it as an opportunity to get Jacky's mask off and take out another superpower. (is this perhaps why Jacky had strapped gear on that couldn't easily be dislodged? Did Jacky have to leave Etienne in the bedroom when the SSoL started, perchance?
MF	There is *no way* these two didn't try to kill each other a few times while fucking. I'm not sure they were, like, *serious* attempts more than probing attacks, but they definitely happened. It also did not dampen the mood.
ML	They weren't serious attempts, but each of them would 100% have gone through with it if they thought there wouldn't be too much collateral damage. And also, that the attempt would succeed.
WOB	I guess they couldn’t have met in the Pyramid, because then Jacky would’ve just killed him.
ML	Idk what counts as "neutral ground" when Etienne can mind control Literally Anyone At All.
MF	Some plateau in the middle of the American desert.
WOB	They could get out in the wilderness and just Brokeback it up
ML	Except also, Etienne has to be close enough to people that his "wipe out a continent" threat still holds. AND he has to alter his connection to his psychic powers to make sure no one gets hit with what he's experiencing (this is probably easy for him). Since Valentina has her long range True Sight, she can probably tell SOMETHING is going on in that general area. But she might not immediately guess what.
MF	Pfft, they both recruit Valentina (unbeknownst to each other) to prevent the murder attempts after things got a bit too spicy.
ML	Valentina is like "what do you want me to do? Do you just want me to watch you having sex??" Etienne is like What No That Would Be Wrong (because he hasn't agreed to it). Jacky is like "you don't already do that?" (He's reasonably sure she doesn't, but only for moral reasons. Which, he points out, is funny. Because it's impossible for her bff to avoid that. As a telepath.)

	Fuck. Someone HAS to write this.
WOB	Is this ship name Jackienne or Jacket?
CE	I like Jacktienne personally but both work. I mean i definitely dont think it’s impossible for Etienne to avoid seeing people fucking, it's been implied or stated several times that he can limit himself to only seeing the most surface thoughts of somebody or even none at all if he chooses. And it's been said that he basically only pries for secrets if absolutely necessary, mostly he finds it unethical to look further than what somebody wants him to know unless he has reason to believe it's a matter of global security
RG	Jacky/Etienne honestly feels so real to me. As much as Heavy is the obvious Magneto to Etienne’s Xavier, Jacky feels like more the intellectual equal. They’re people with very firm philosophies who have read a lot of books and maybe think about the power they hold more than anyone else in the series. It’s the Doctor Doom/Reed Richards smartest guys in the room sexual tension that radiates from every scene of them together.
ML	I know the concept isn't really specific enough to say this, but I like how this fandom has reinvented kismeses. *(Ed: a concept from the webcomic Homestuck that’s like a really intense rivalry that’s also sexual. Don't worry about it.)*
WOB	Yeah because we want these characters be kissing and messy.
ML	Booooo. Arguably, though. He would have to see that they were having sex in the first place. To know to avoid their minds
WOB	He can probably just program himself to avoid reading sex thoughts. Which actually might be a good loophole if someone did all of their end of the world planning while they were having sex, they could get the element of surprise.
ML	I love the stupid 5D chess that is everpresent in this comic. And therefore, every discussion of it. Turns out Dev and Eliza *didn't* need to stay in the Pyramid to plan his murder. Who knew?
WOB	Also, I think Etienne bottoms, but that’s just me.
MF	I think it's pretty funny that Jacky/Etienne was introduced as a crackship, yet it's the one we've spent the most time talking about.
WOB	It’s compelling!
ML	I wasn't expecting it to be, but now I'm hooked
CE	But who would ever have sex just before/while plotting against Etienne?? that would neverrrr happen
WOB	Jacky would be plotting against Etienne while having sex WITH Etienne.
RC	Since Jacky is already safe from Etienne's mind reading he doesn't even need to do his plotting then. It's just love of the game
ML	Lovehate of the game. Natural consequence of him being around Etienne for too long. Even while also having sex with him.

(Ed: That's quite enough of that.)

Art by Jay E.

Afterword: Eleven Issues, On And Off…

By Jay E.

…and then I had seconds. To write the letter from the co-editor, wrapping up the zine… okay, I've got a little longer than seconds, but still. At the end of another wonderful zine, speaking to our wonderful readers and contributors, what can I say?

First, of course, I want to say thank you. If you've read this far, and especially if some of the work in here is yours, I can't thank you enough for being a part of *The Power Fantasy*'s small but thriving fandom.

And second, if you're interested in seeing more of us, check out our Discord server and social sites here:

Discord: https://discord.com/invite/YWWP2AQRhp

Tumblr: https://www.tumblr.com/thepowercut

itch.io: https://thepowercut.itch.io/

We'll keep you updated there, and the Discord is also a general chat server for TPF fans, so we hope to see you around!

Until next time,

Jay E.